TECHNIQUE OF MUSICAL EXPRESSION

A Text Book for Singers

By

Albert Gérard-Thiers

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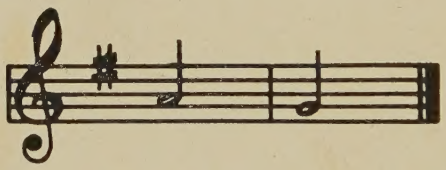

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TECHNIQUE

OF

MUSICAL EXPRESSION

A Text Book for Singers

BY

ALBERT GÉRARD-THIERS

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THE THEODORE REBLA PUBLISHING CO.

NEW YORK

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TO MY WIFE.

"For the work that a man shall do—
Be he peasant, or knight, or king—
Is to strive alway, in toil and fray,
'Till at last his hands may bring
To her he loves the prize she loves—
Though little or great the thing."

From RANDOLPH HARTLEY'S
"The Quest of Heart's Desire."

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PREFACE.

THE cordial appreciation with which my lecture on the "Technique of Musical Expression," first delivered in New York April 16, 1900, was received by musicians, and the widespread demand for its subsequent repetition, seem to show an awakening realization on the part of teachers and students of the need of more exact and scientific explanation of artistic methods, and lead me to the belief that the time has come to express my convictions on this subject in a more permanent form, and more fully and conclusively than is practicable in the narrow limits of a lecture.

Many works on musical aesthetics enunciate some of the rules explained in this book, for they have been instinctively followed by many from the earliest infancy of Art; the underlying theory is, however, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original with me, being the result of years of study and experience as a singer and teacher. As is more explicitly stated in its concluding pages, the rules set forth are not intended to take the place of temperament, but simply to enable the thinking musician to make better use of his gifts. I believe it to be in the power of every talented student to become a true artist. That there is not a larger, and a more rapidly increasing company of artists to-day is due to the fact that Art has been confused with genius, and regarded as a revelation from Heaven. The man of genius, conforming instinctively to the laws of Nature and therefore of artistic beauty, has not analyzed his inspiration and has been unable to impart it to others. He has not recognized the existence of a *technique* of expression, but has applied the word to mere mechanical execution which is the result of mental activity on the lowest plane; consequently his pupils, so far as he is concerned, have remained students forever, lacking the key to conscious interpretation, and therefore (in a sense) to creative power.

My illustrations are purposely selected, wherever possible, from well-known songs and from scores which are in every musical library. My

aim is suggestive rather than exhaustive (either of the subject, or of the reader)! It is hoped rather to incite in the student a desire for more intelligent work, and that these pages may be of service to the vocal teacher in defining much that has too long been considered incapable of explanation. Artistic sins are peculiarly the result of ignorance. It is with the hope of contributing to the ideals as well as to the scholarship of singers, and of encouraging them to a more symmetrical development of artistic power, that this book is written. It is, in spite of the seemingly mechanical import of the word "technique," an appeal for the dignity and integrity of Art.

ALBERT GÉRARD-THIERS.

Carnegie Hall, New York.

Technique of Musical Expression

EVERY student of every art creates, as did Frankenstein, a monster—a being of his own making that is quite separate and apart from his own soul. This monster is called Technique—Technique, the craftsman. However great the inborn artistic talent, it is unable to produce anything without Technique, and this means of self-expression must be developed by each one for himself. The student of vocal music begins the creation of his monster the moment he is able to put into practice the first principle of tone production; every bit of skill that he acquires adds to its strength and stature, and in the life of every artist there comes a time when Talent and Technique, the two beings of his artistic personality, do battle for supremacy. If in the contest Technique comes off victorious, the artist is doomed forever to be a mere machine, a slave to the mechanical side of his art; but, on the other hand, if Talent conquers, Technique will be a loyal servant, executing the plans that Talent devises, evolving from the vaguest dreams of the artist forms of definite beauty and proportion in the audible-tone world.

Technique, from *Τεκεῖν;* **to bring forth, produce,** *Webster.*

In building this useful monster practice is the most indispensable tool; but instruction is also needful, less Technique be formed awry; and that sharp little instrument, the interrogation point, is one that the student should always have ready at his hand. He should thrust it deep into each principle expounded by his teachers, for the purpose of discovering the great law upon which it must rest; for beauty in Art is harmony with the underlying forces of Nature, and there is nothing in the way of musical expression that has not a foundation in philo-

sophical and natural law. Once a student learns the real basis of a rule there is little danger that he will forget its application.

Primitive Elements of Music.

Music, reduced to its primitive elements, is found, like the universe itself, to consist rather vaguely of *force and motion*, which manifest a visible or audible world through immutable laws; consequently it will be found that all the details of technique, whether mechanical or interpretive, can be classed under two great heads. More minute classification and subdivision reveal less than ten modes of expression, or musical devices which comprise all artistic effect. They are, briefly, the Crescendo and Decrescendo, Attack, Accent, and other minutiae concerning emphasis and the distribution of *force*, as indicated by the dynamic signs Forte, Piano, Sforzando, etc.; the Accelerando and Ritardando, and a few further points which come under the laws of rhythm, which is *motion* viewed from the art standpoint. It is therefore apparent that the practical understanding of a comparatively small number of rules should form the full equipment of every artist in interpretation, and education in this higher technique should accompany, not follow, the cultivation of the purely mechanical side of voice production—if indeed anything may be termed *purely* mechanical which is governed by cosmic law through mental activity.

Force and Motion.

Be it remarked before passing to higher things, that the failure of many teachers, who have devoted much time and thought to the formulation of vocal methods in supposed accordance with scientific knowledge of the construction and action of the lungs and vocal chords, is due to the disregard of one of the primary laws of mind which governs such physiological action. It is universally recognized that while the motor power of the human body may be located in the brain, its activity is sub-conscious, even if not, strictly speaking, involuntary. Thus in order to move our arms with the most definite purpose no *conscious* exertion of will power is required, and a knowledge of anatomy in that direction is a mere luxury—not in any sense a necessity. This is to a large extent true of the more complicated art of voice production, for the action of the lungs and vocal chords in singing is involuntary in the same sense and to the same degree that it is in speech, and that muscular action is in walking. Our main care in

Faulty Vocal Methods.

learning to sing should be the same as in our daily walk—simply to *remove obstructions from our path,* exercise supplying all needed strength and skill. The person who devotes conscious thought to the motion of his legs while walking will experience in a very short time a strange fatigue; and the vocal chords of a pupil who is allowed to acquire unnecessary knowledge and to indulge in preoccupation regarding their physical condition while singing, will suffer from contraction—sometimes to such a degree as to cripple his development.

It would seem that since musical expression is based upon unchanging law, it is impossible that there should (as to general outline or idea) be more than one right way of interpreting any one passage. People there are who, either from eccentricity or from lack of moral balance, refuse to be governed by natural laws. In social science such persons are called anarchists, in musical science charlatans. They are outlaws, and we are told by Nordau that to be outside of the natural law is an evidence of degeneracy. Anarchy, charlatanism, and even degeneracy, if it be picturesque, sometimes win notoriety for the moment, but only the normal can gain fame for all time.

Musical Charlatanism.

At the beginning of the study of acoustics we are informed by Helmholz, Tyndall, and other authorities that a vibration imparted to the aural nerve makes us conscious of sound, which is caused primarily by the displacement of air. The violin string, the lips of the horn player, and the vocal chords in the larynx, no less than the firing of a cannon or the rolling surf, produce sound by giving motion to the air. Such motions imparted singly or irregularly are to the ear merely noise; but when the motion is regular and occurs a stated number of times per second it becomes a musical tone. The exact number of vibrations per second which can be recognized as a sound has not been precisely determined, as the hearing capacity varies with different persons, but for practical musical purposes the limits may be fixed between 40 and 4,000 per second. *As the number of vibrations is increased the sound is raised in pitch,* and this fact is the physical basis of one great artistic law which, with the rules deducible from it, governs fully one-half of all normal musical effect. MUSIC AS IT RISES IN THE SCALE INCREASES BOTH IN SPEED AND FORCE. This is a rule in music

Vibrations.

Great Primary Law.

1 (1)

because it is a law of Nature, one of the simplest illustrations being furnished us by the wind, which, whistling through a keyhole, goes up the scale as it increases in force and velocity.

From this general rule may be reasonably inferred the particular ones concerning the correct use of the *Crescendo* and Decrescendo. It is shown that one should crescendo (gradually increase in force and sonority) when ascending, and decrescendo (diminish gradually) when descending the scale. The use of the *Accelerando* and *Ritardando* is governed by the same general rule. Increase in speed (accelerando) as well as force when ascending, and retard (ritardando) proportionately when descending in the scale. There is another reason beside the one regarding vibrations: the pressing up and then holding back is to overcome gravity. When we go uphill we push, strain every nerve to get to the top; then in descending we restrain our speed and force. In music we *accelerate* until we see the goal near at hand—until ***nearly*** at the top of the hill, where we pause for a longer or shorter period (according to the length of the ascent and the energy expended)—to rest, or to see where we are going, or to turn and come down at a more moderate speed (ritardando). No one runs over the top of a hill unless he is going for a doctor! If the same force were used in coming down as in mounting the results would be disastrous, since in going up gravity is a burden to be lifted, while in descending it becomes a propelling force.

1 **Crescendo and Decrescendo.**

1 **Accelerando and Ritardando.**

These rules may find a higher illustration, and one that is equally appropriate, in the mental life of man. Mentally and morally, as well as physically, to ascend means to overcome the law of gravitation toward the lower side of our nature, and the higher the goal and the steeper the ascent the greater must be the momentum and energy required to surmount them, and the stronger our consciousness of victory, followed inevitably, as we know too well, by fatigue and reaction; and hold back as we may, we soon find ourselves again at the foot of the slope of aspiration or on the monotonous level of the commonplace. To translate again into terms of musical art: it is impossible to expend especial energy without producing an increase

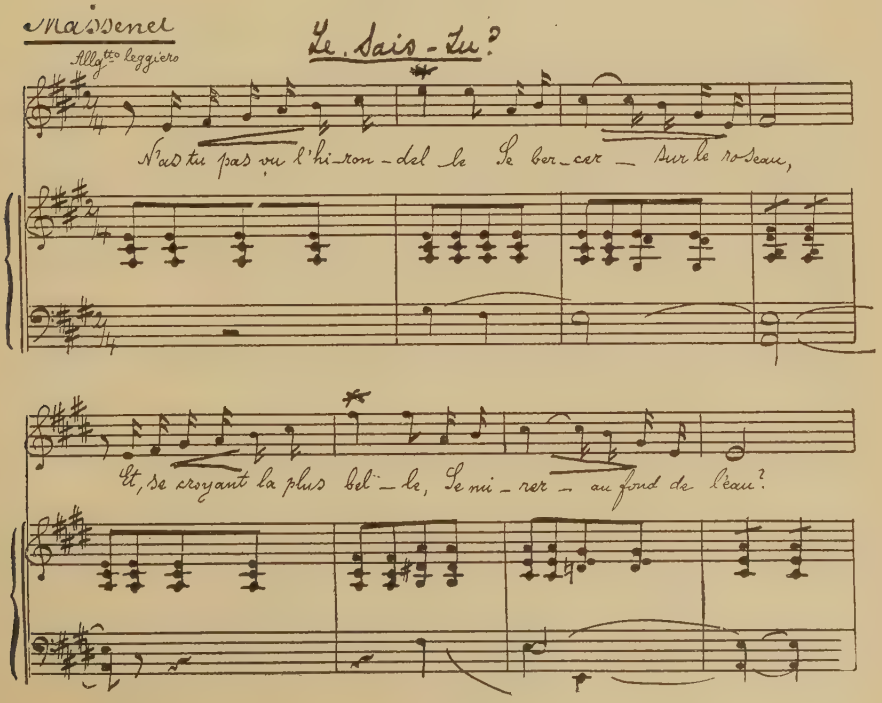
Mental Gravitation.

in time and tone, which must be followed by a corresponding slackening; for the law of proportion and compensation is even more inexorably insisted upon in Art than in life, and balance must be preserved at all cost. A true sense of proportion is after all the summing up of the secret of life and art, and it must be our guide in the proper application of this rule concerning the CRESCENDO and DECRESCENDO, ACCELERANDO and RITARDANDO which, as has been already stated, governs half of all musical effect. Although founded upon a law of Nature it is subject to variation or even suspension when coming in contact with other laws. Some of the exceptions to its normal working will be brought out later in dealing with other sides of our subject. A few examples follow which illustrate its use.

Law of Proportion.

(1) [1]

Example 1.

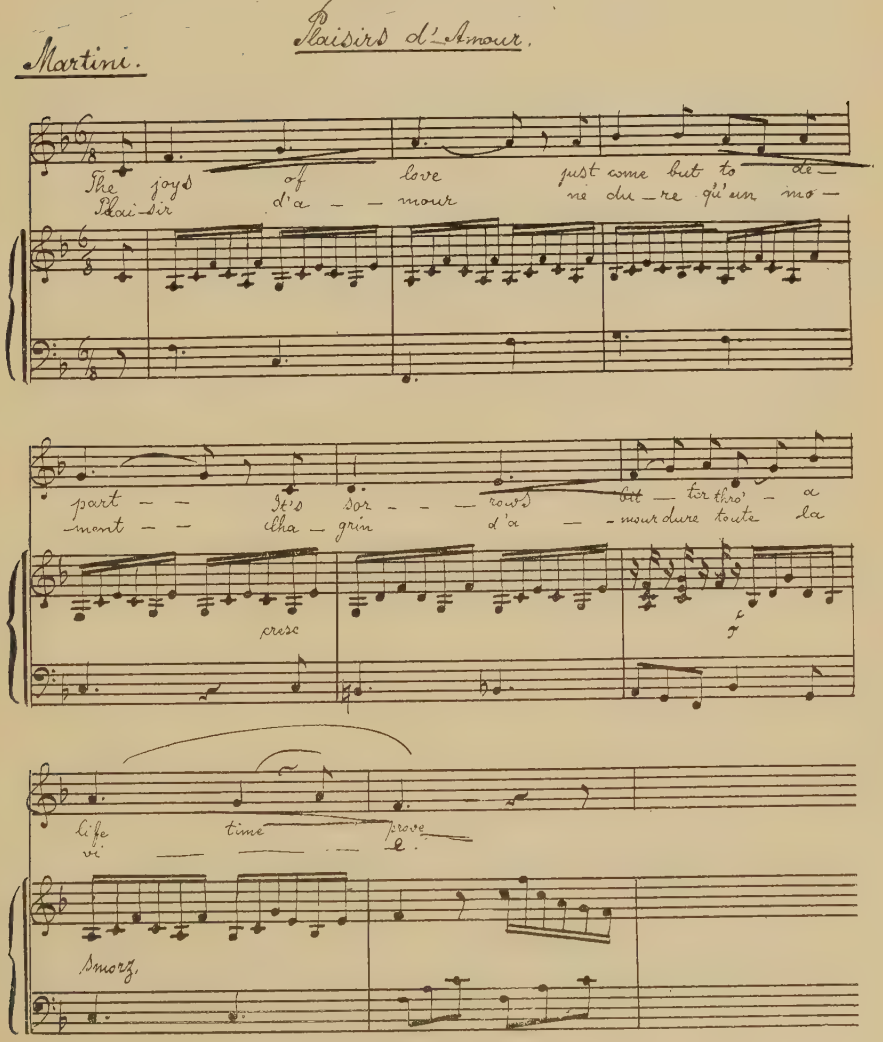


These opening bars from Massenet's song reveal not only in musical structure, but in their general spirit, so manifest an application of this rule that detailed comment concerning them seems almost an affront to the intelligence of the singer. The upward rush of the first measure with its question: "Hast thou not seen the swallow?" is charmingly suggestive, and one may safely rely upon the natural instinct toward Decrescendo and Ritardando in the descent from the second measure to the repetition of the phrase, in which the Accelerando and subsequent Ritardando must be more marked than the first time, as the climatic note is higher.

In some compositions (notably the earlier classics) there are no structural heights or depths sufficiently marked to seem to warrant a fluctuation in speed, although the necessity of tonal gradations as a preservative from monotony will be conceded by every one. Yet there is never a Crescendo without an accompanying Accelerando, though when done to perfection it is often scarcely perceptible as such except to the trained ear. Indeed, in a quiet melody like Padre Martini's famous air, "Plaisirs d'amour," an appeal to the metronome is sometimes necessary in order to convince the listener that the impalpable Accelerando and Ritardando are the secret of what he had vaguely called "temperament"!

Unrecognized Variations in Tempo.

Example 2.



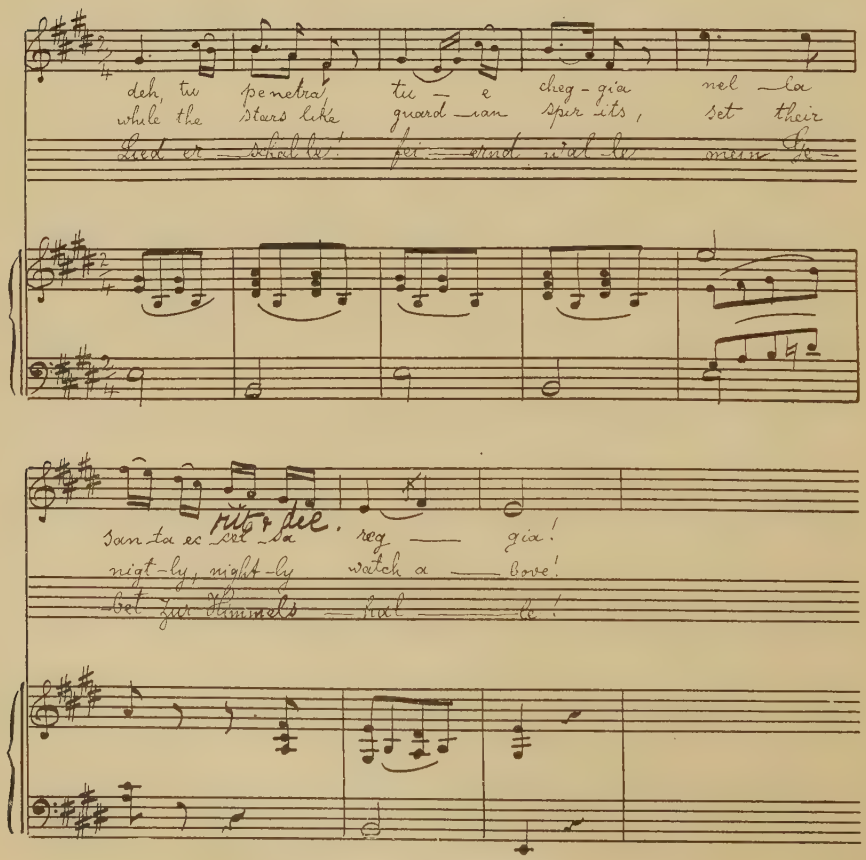
The use of these variations in tone and time should always be measured by their relation to the passages preceding and following them as well as

to the general tempo of the composition, of which we shall have later more to say. Thus, in the fragment from "Der Freischütz" the descending sixteenth notes in the sixth measure are a reaction after a climax, whereas in the song "Schön Gretelein" the descent from the first bar is a gradual one throughout, and the Ritardando should be less marked until very near the end. Example 5 shows a correspondingly gradual ascent.

1

Example 3.

Prima Donna Album — Freischütz



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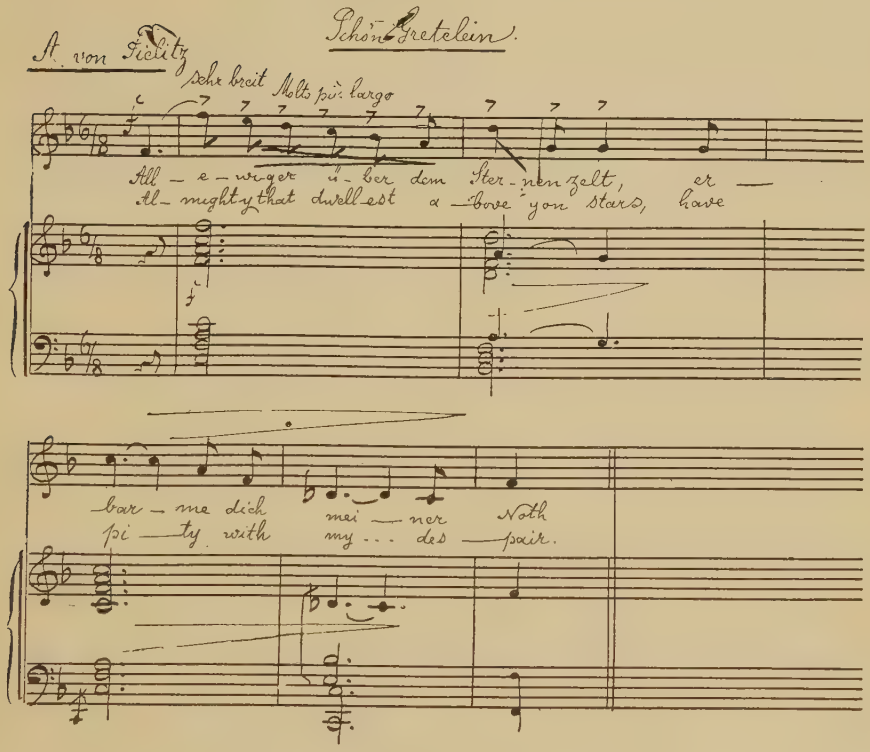
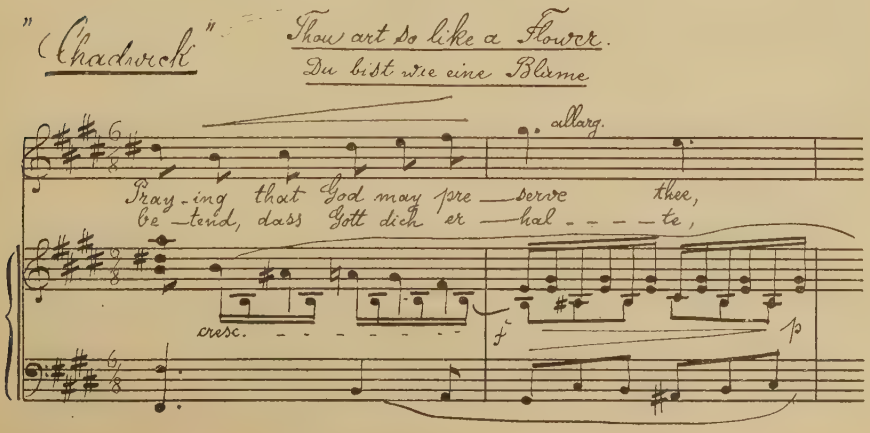
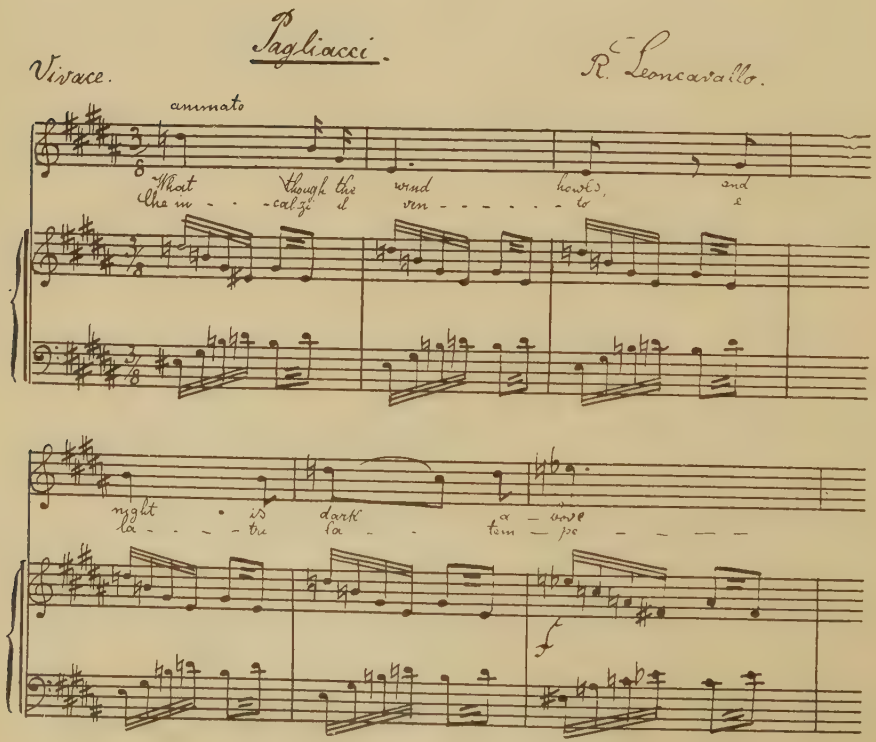


Example 5.

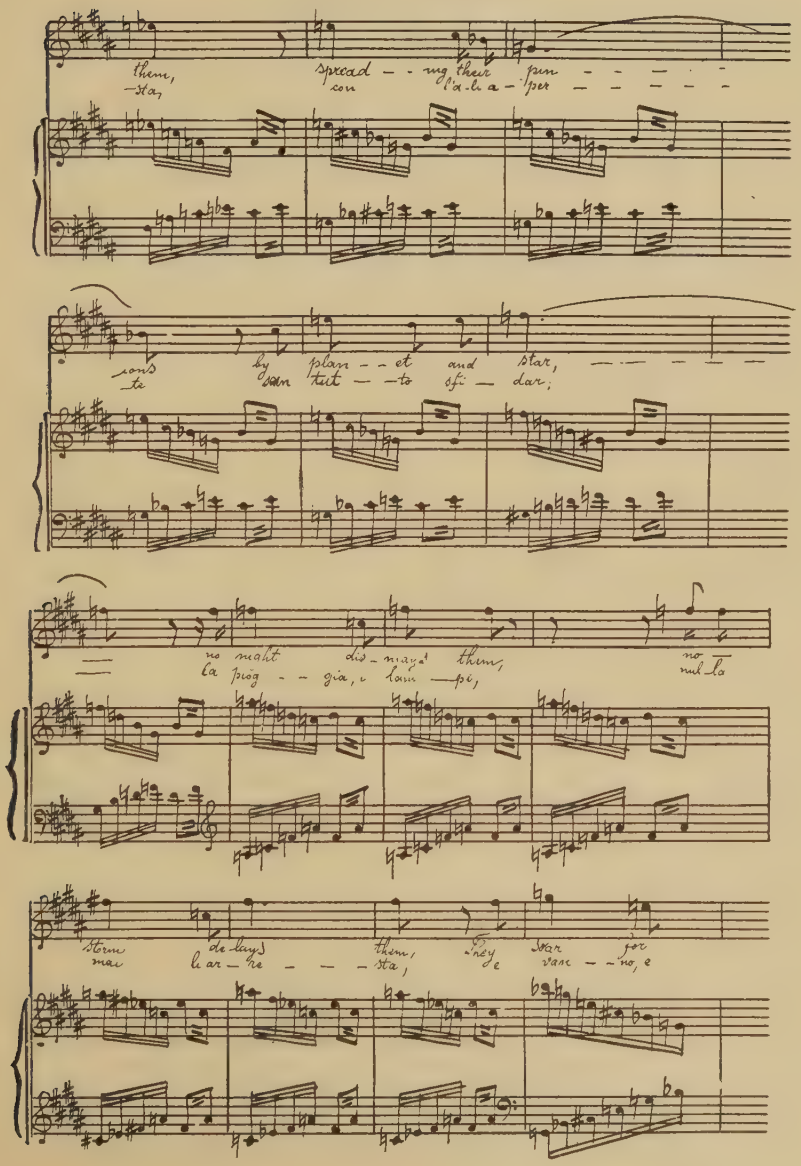


1 (1) In the following excerpt from Pagliacci there should be a gradual crescendo and accelerando throughout. While melody descends in the first three measures, it rises at once to E flat, and there ensues a corresponding succession of six bars in which the passage starts one note higher, returning to F. From the twelfth bar the accompaniment becomes ever more agitated; in the vocal part F is pushed to F sharp, to G natural, and finally, starting an octave below in order to gather momentum afresh, it reaches the climax on G sharp in a triumphant burst.

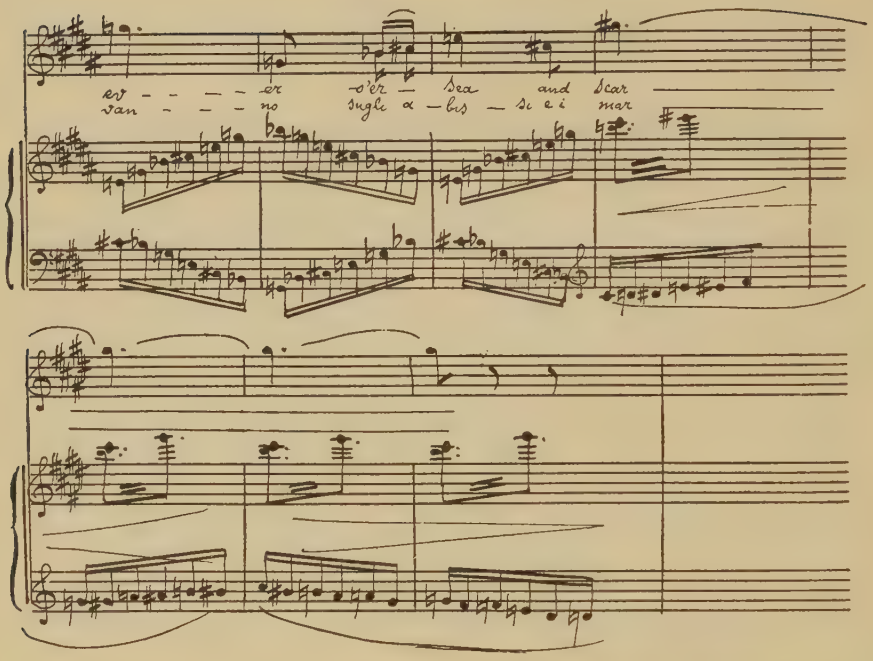
Example 6.



Pagliacci—Continued.



Pagliacci—Continued.



The discussion of this rule in greater detail must be preceded by the exposition of other fundamental principles. To touch upon the artistic use of the *Crescendo* and *Diminuendo* is to plunge at once into the middle of our subject; yet this rule is cited in this place in order to show at the outset conclusive proof of our contention: that emotional effects, long left to the uneducated taste of the individual, should be regulated—no less than the more mechanical side of music—by artistic law.

1

Rhythm.

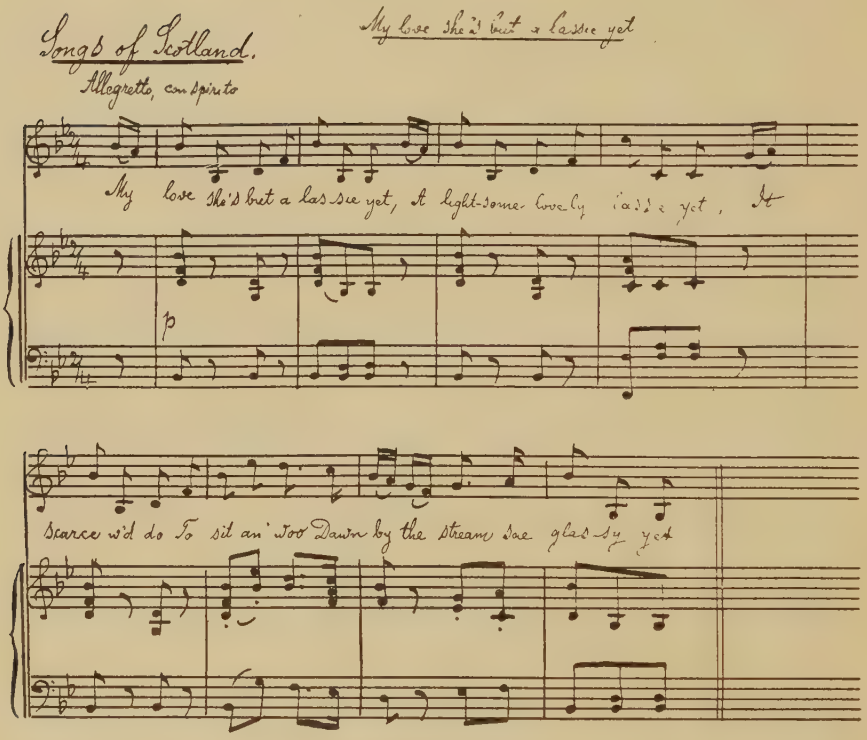
Music as an art begins and ends with rhythm. It is the great law which governs the beats of the human heart, the tread of advancing armies, and underlies the soothing influence of the cradle that is rocked by the gentle mother's hand. A break in the rhythm causes the child to move uneasily in its sleep, a break in the rhythm throws a regiment into disorder, a break in the rhythm may one day cause the destruction of the world.

The recognition of this law in music has caused what we call *measures;* for as vibration must be regular and occur a certain number of times per second in order to produce a musical tone, so tones in order to produce a definite musical impression must recur with a certain regularity and within fixed limits. The first note in such a division is accented in order to show the rhythmic starting place, and the energy generated at this point may or may not (according to the length of the measure) be sufficient to carry the musician to the end. Thus duple time (2-4) consists of one accented and one unaccented beat; while quadruple time (an instinctive doubling of the former), requires a secondary accent on the third beat. This may be easily illustrated by bouncing a ball. Throw it down and catch it at once, counting two; then throw it down with the same force and allow it to rebound once, counting four. It will be noticed that it strikes the ground the second time and rebounds with diminished force, and this accent on the third beat of a measure is therefore given about half the weight of the first or primary accent. In triple time the force of the primary accent is almost sufficient: there is only a slight pressure on the last beat—a sort of gathering of the forces for the heavy accent immediately to follow. There is also a slight recognition of the law of gravitation, since long notes, requiring the greatest effort to sustain, are normally placed at the beginning of measures, the shorter and less important ones gravitating irresistibly toward them. The longer the note the stronger necessarily the accent, and the longer the measure and the slower the tempo the stronger all accents, both primary and secondary.

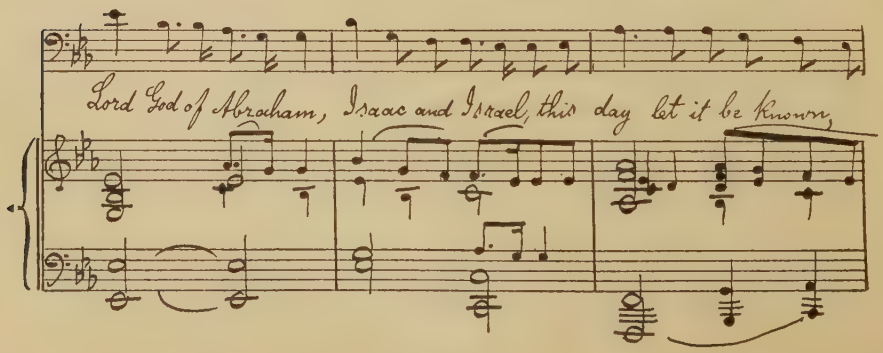
2 8 **Measures and Simple Accents.**

2 **Accents and Gravitation.**

Example 7.



Example 8.



This may be casually illustrated by the two examples, from the Scotch song and from "Elijah." The first, written in 2-4 time, requires only the lightest accent: its inherent motion is sufficient. The second is not only in 4-4 time, but beside this is broad, declamatory and serious, requiring the full force of the singer.

2

The subject of Tempo or relative rhythm will be considered later, and the complex ramifications of the primary rhythms are not touched upon as the student concerning himself with theories of interpretation is presumably well grounded in such matters. It is intended, by showing the great primal instinct which underlies all rhythm, to remind the student of its importance as an essential element of all artistic rendition. The singer who *unintelligently* disregards it is always a failure. The most ordinary melodic form played or sung rhythmically will be thought more beautiful than one more truly lovely that has lost its accent; for an audience, whether composed of savages or of the most highly civilized people of the earth, is more quickly impressed by rhythm than by any other quality in music. The bodies of listeners move in time with the music, unwittingly the hearer breathes more or less with it, and when the song is done the applause is the finest, and to the singer the most welcome, example of the power of rhythm that one may wish to hear! It has been well said that time is the pulse of music, and in the interpretation of a composition the general regularity of rhythm may be said to indicate a healthy condition of the musical system, while, as in the human organism, its variations register unfailingly every fluctuation of emotion. The foundational law of rhythm is, however, temporarily displaced by all the higher laws of emotional expression, examples of which we have already seen in illustration of the rules for Accelerando and Ritardando. (See pages 11-16.) Yet for the sake of artistic symmetry it is necessary after such an expenditure of force to *return with particular emphasis to strict time:* even as we are obliged to balance by careful living the demands made upon the physical system by circumstances of strain and stress. The failure to recognize this rule causes an abuse of the so-called Tempo Rubato which renders the performance of many gifted young singers sentimental, affected, and devoid of any coherent

Primal Instinct of Rhythm.

Pulse of Music.

True Tempo Rubato.

False Tempo Rubato.

appeal to the musical intelligence of their audience. Led by their uneducated "temperament" from emotion to emotion, they forget the musical medium with which they started: the *time* which was the normal pulse of the composition, and the result is the degeneracy of what might have been a noble utterance of artistic truth into the hurrying and pointless images of a dreamer.

The student should never make a variation in rhythm without a good reason, always first convincing himself that the impulse to do so is based upon a law which is really, for the time being, more important than the healthy instinct of regularity that it is to supersede. Once persuaded, however, of the reasonable ground of his conception, let him sing with the force of this conviction. A lack of authority in phrasing is a more noticeable difference between artists and students than mere discrepancy in tone production, and as a poor attack is due to want of confidence and definite musical intention, it is characteristic of the unthinking—student and amateur alike. The realization that, all musical effect for the singer being governed by a few simple rules (which cannot be sufficiently insisted upon), there is consequently for any given passage one interpretation, and only one demanded by reason of law, should supply the intelligent singer who has based his rendering of a composition upon these universal rules with such conviction of its musical truth as to enable him to more than equal the average artist in the point of attack and authority; for while the average artist knows as a general thing *what* he intends to do, he does not always know *why* and so is frequently wanting in musical consistency.

2 **Authority in Phrasing.**

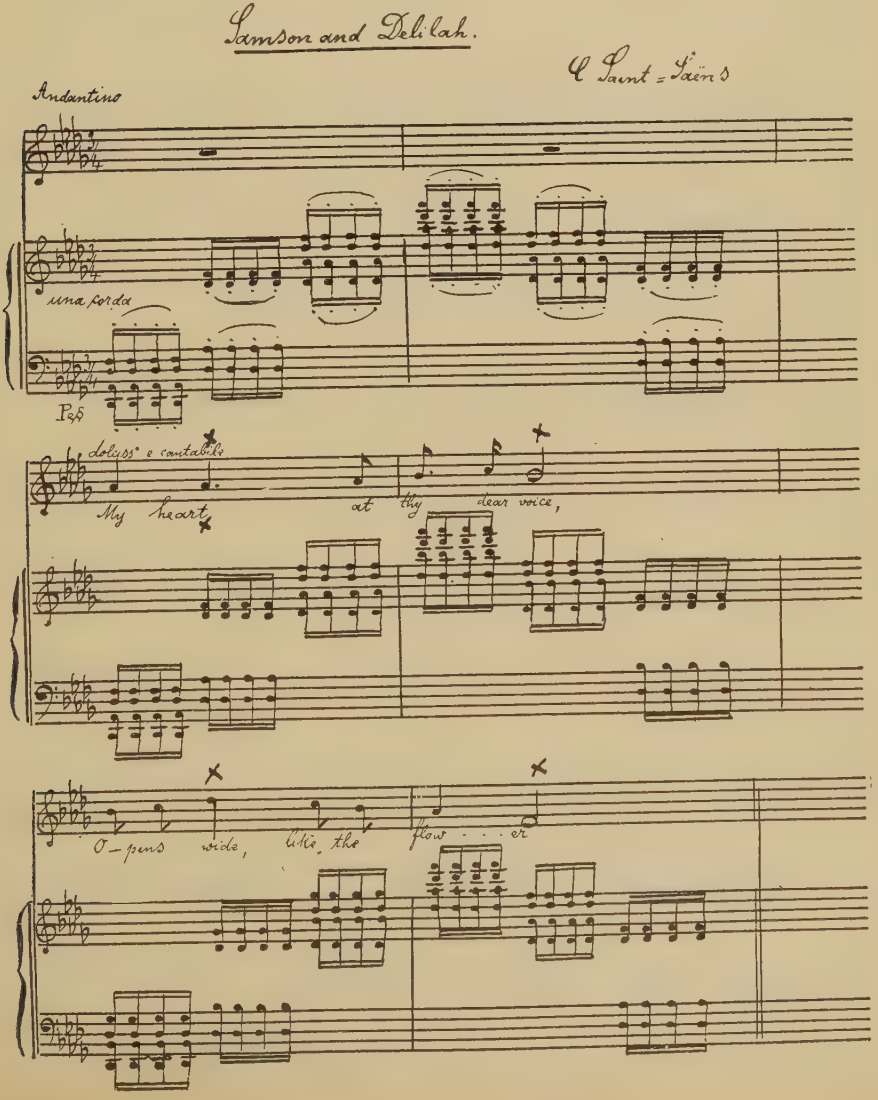
Attack.

It is true that the natural accent in a measure may often be displaced for cogent reasons without actually altering the rhythm. Syncopated passages are the simplest and most obvious exceptions to the primary rule. Syncopation displaces the accent either by prolonging a note written on an unaccented beat over an accented one, as in bar 3 of the following example; or (which is practically the same thing) by placing the longest note of the measure contrary to common usage, on an unaccented beat. It then becomes, by the laws of weight and gravitation already mentioned, the important note of the measure, and as such requires particular emphasis. See bars 4, 5 and 6

3 **Syncopation.**

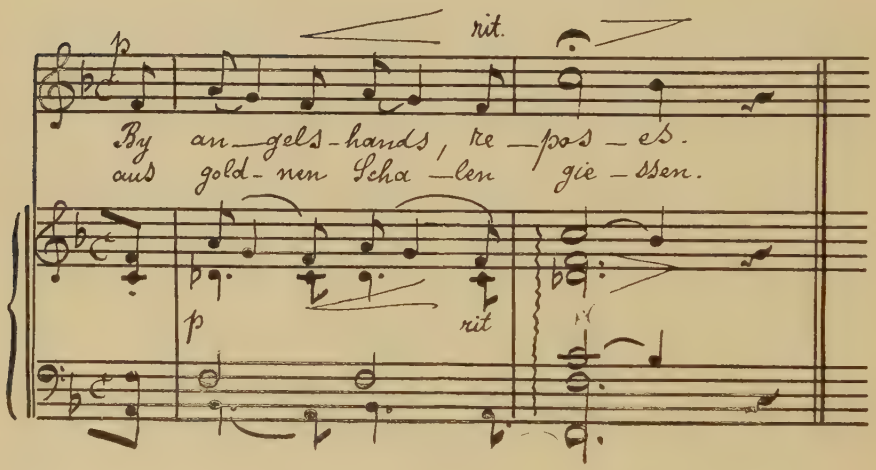
of the same example, and also the next example from Ries' song: "Es muss was wunderbares sein."

Example 9.



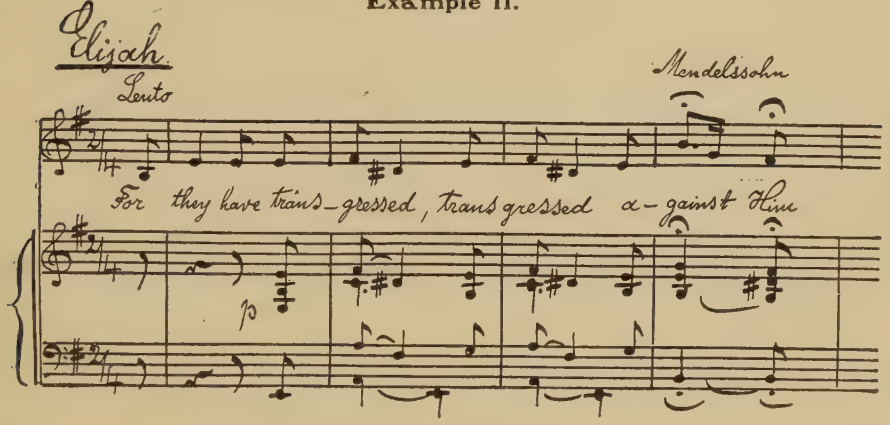
Example 10.

"Ries." *Most wondrous it must be.*
Es muss was wunderbares sein.



The note which precedes a syncopated note should be *slightly* detached. This small point in execution is like all the rest, in conformity with a natural tendency: if you wish to strike firmly with a hammer, you lift it in order to do so.

Example 11.



Syncopated passages must be emphatically brought out, for a composer never disregards the normal accent unless with the intention of giving to a passage some special significance. In Example 9, from Samson and Delilah, the syncopation is employed quite simply and naturally to emphasize the most important words in the way we would instinctively read them: "My *heart* at thy dear *voice* opens *wide* like a flower." The singer possesses a great advantage over other musicians in that he can gain some insight into the quality of the composer's intentions by reference to the written text. This brings us naturally to the second class of exceptions to the fundamental rule regarding accent: that due to the higher claims of the musical phrase over those of the single measure.

Musical Metre.

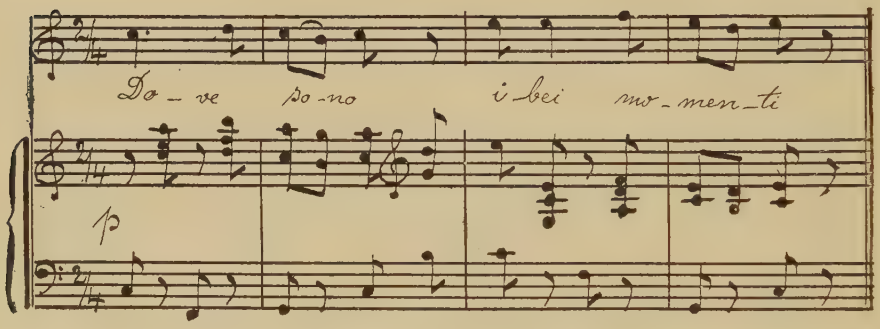
Phrasing is to music what punctuation is to speech. Indeed as musical phrases follow one another with a certain regularity and are divided into longer or shorter sections according to rule, they suggest not only the punctuation of sentences, but more properly the *metre* in poetry. "The smallest limits, within which a harmonic and melodic thought may be expressed, is the phrase." (Goetschius' System of Harmony.)

The Phrase.

It is usually two, four, or six bars in length, seldom an uneven number; although it is often made to seem so by various devices, such as the prolongation of certain notes, the contraction of two bars into one, or a corresponding extension, repetition of measures, etc.

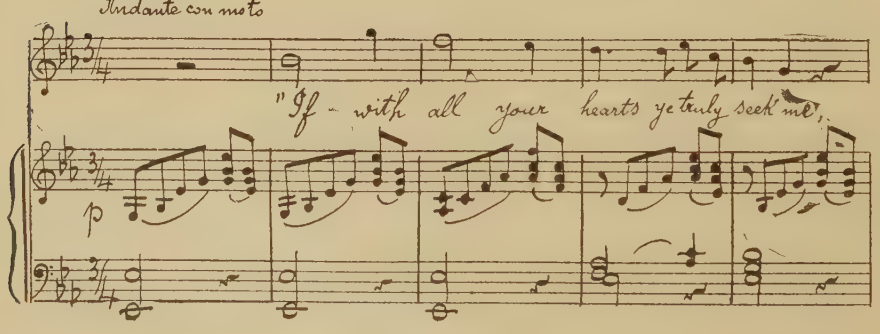
Example 12.

Mozart. Dove Sono "Le Nozze di Figaro" Syncopation.

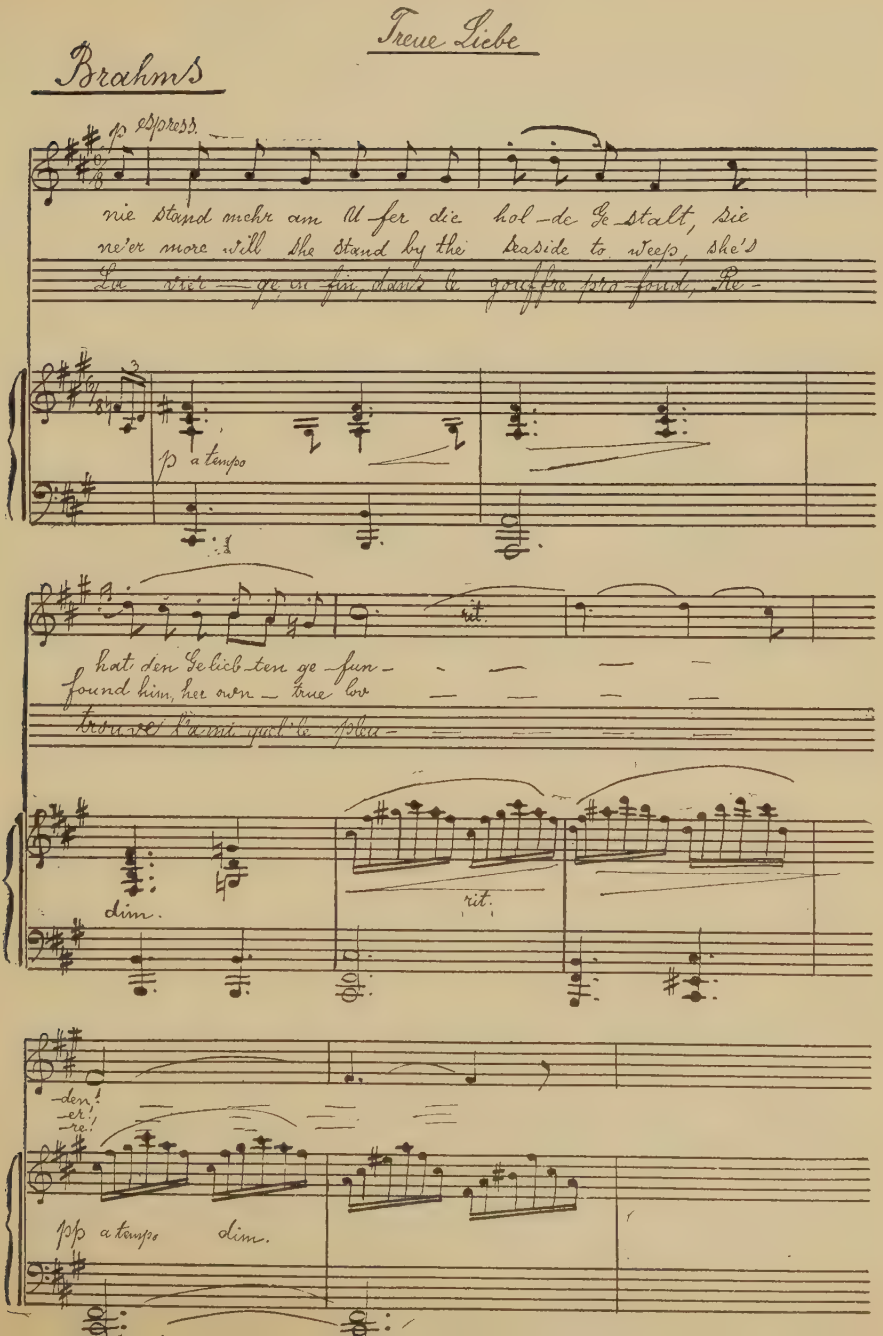


Example 13.

Elijah. Mendelssohn.

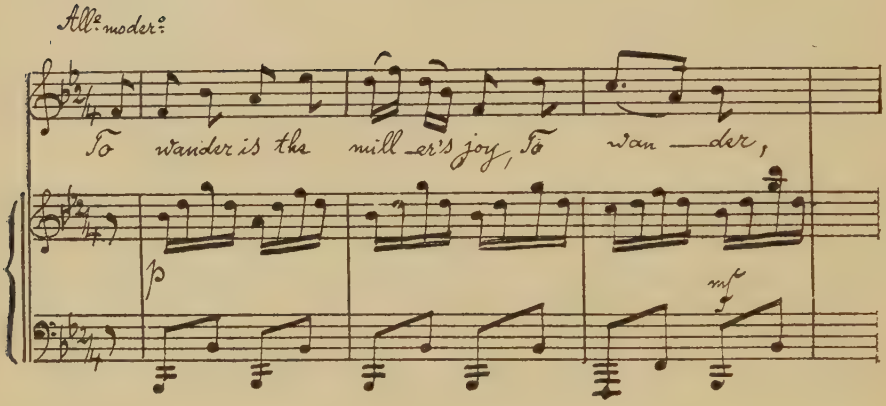


Example 14—Extended Phrase.



Example 15—Three-Bar Phrase.

Wandering.



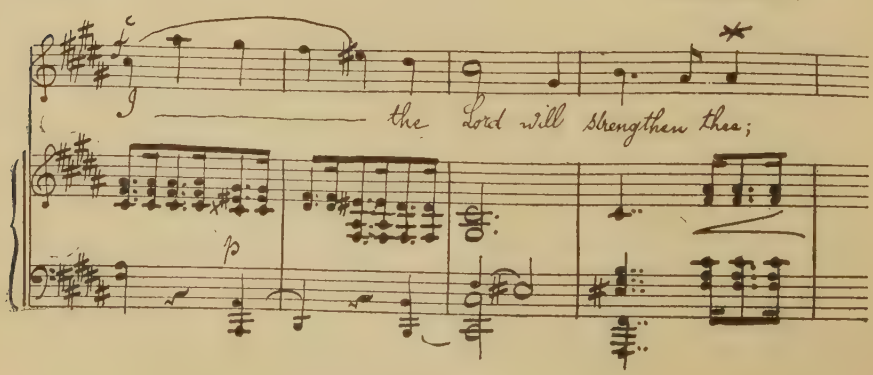
Structure of Phrases.

The student will notice that phrases do not always start at the first note in a measure. They may begin on any beat or fraction of a beat, but their *final* note, at whatever point in the measure, *must* fall on the beginning of a beat, forming part of an important chord capable of giving to the ear a certain sense of repose.

Example 16.

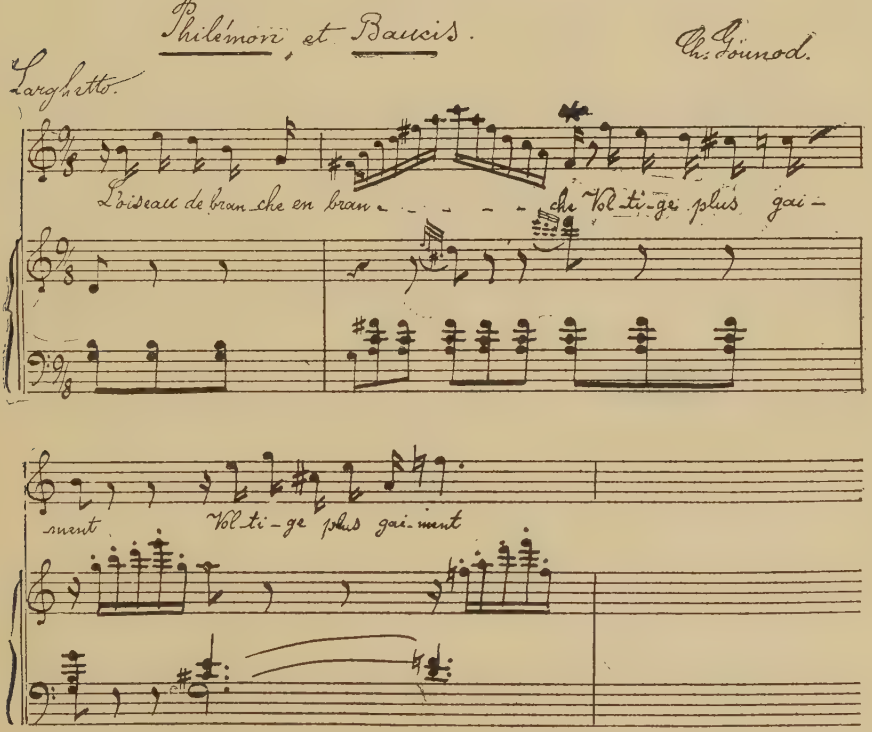
Elijah.

Mendelssohn.



(3) Good punctuation (phrasing) demands that in cases where the end of a phrase is but the beginning of a group of notes forming a beat, that the remaining notes of the group shall be detached from it, as they are either the transition to or the actual beginning of a second phrase.

Example 17.



The combination of phrases, their form, and the manner of their recurrence show the plan of construction, and have been aptly termed the skeleton of the composition. Phrases of similar length and character usually follow one another, forming either a *section* or else what is known as a *period*, according to the chord upon which the succession closes. The last phrase of a *period*

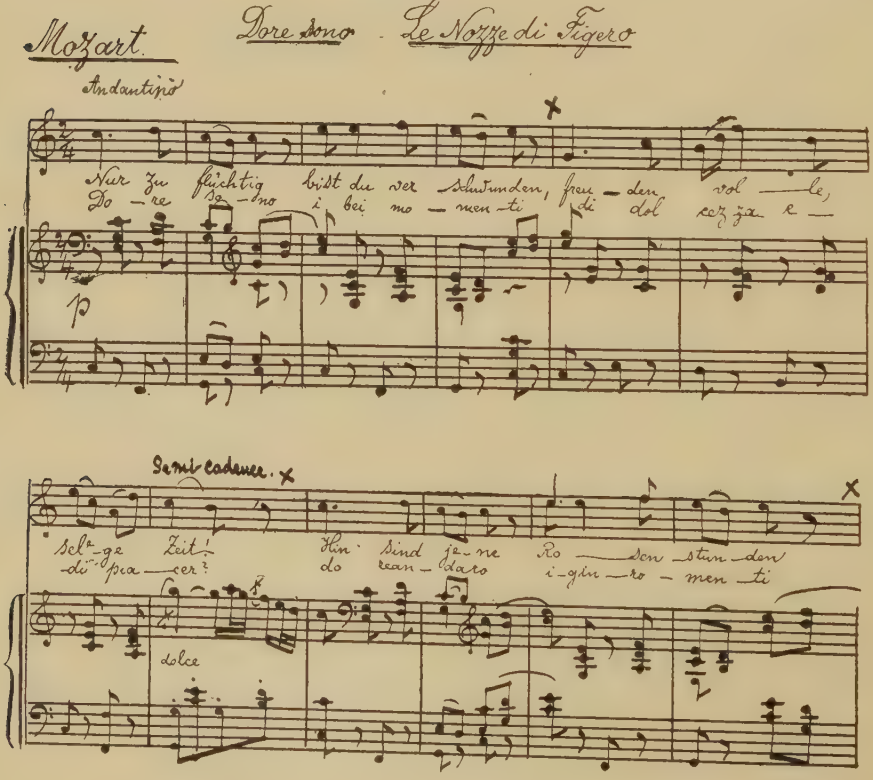
The Period.

must conclude in a definite manner upon the keynote or "tonic"—the only note capable of giving the impression of final repose. This ending is called the perfect cadence, and occurs, as has been stated, at the end of each period, also (by obvious inference), at the end of the piece. The ending of a section is called the semi-cadence, because, although based upon an important chord it gives to the ear but partial rest.

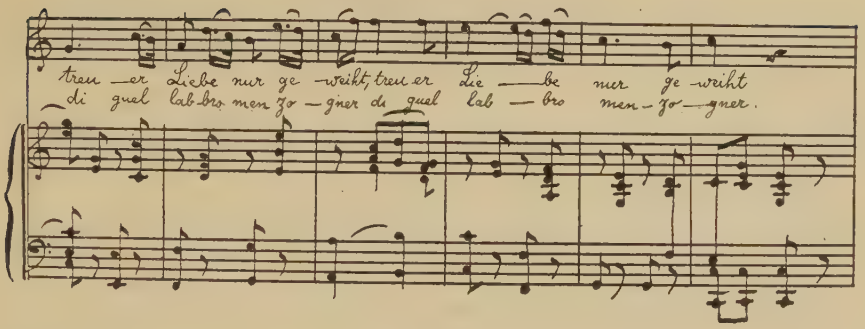
The Cadence.

The following example is a *period* containing four *sections*, each subdivided into two phrases. The last section is variously extended, the perfect cadence occupying the last three measures.

Example 18.



Example 18—Continued.



2

The analogy between these cadences and the different marks of grammatical punctuation will be at once perceived, and its recognition should be of assistance to the student in assigning to the section its proportionate emphasis.

Although incidental mention will be made later of some of the more important chord relationships, it is impossible in a book aiming principally at the discussion of technique for singers to enter upon the details of musical form. It is hoped, however, that by indicating the scientific basis of each law of interpretation the student may be led to investigate them more fully for himself, and to enter the path which, through the study of harmony, theory, and musical history in its many ramifications, leads to a broad culture and musicianship, too seldom met with even in the most enthusiastic believers in the dignity and high mission of musical art.

Now, while the time in which a composition is written is its pulse, and as a healthy physical basis must be insisted upon except when swept away by temporary emotional conditions, yet phrases are clauses in a musical sentence and, as the expression of the musical idea must be brought out at the expense of all minor considerations, hence this general rule: THE FIRST NOTE OF EVERY PHRASE SHOULD BE ACCENTED, WHATEVER ITS PLACE IN THE BAR OR BEAT. Singers, in their privilege of referring to the text, have also in this matter of phrasing an advantage over the instrumentalist; but they should beware of putting too implicit trust in this method of determining the correct interpretation of any passage. Let them ex-

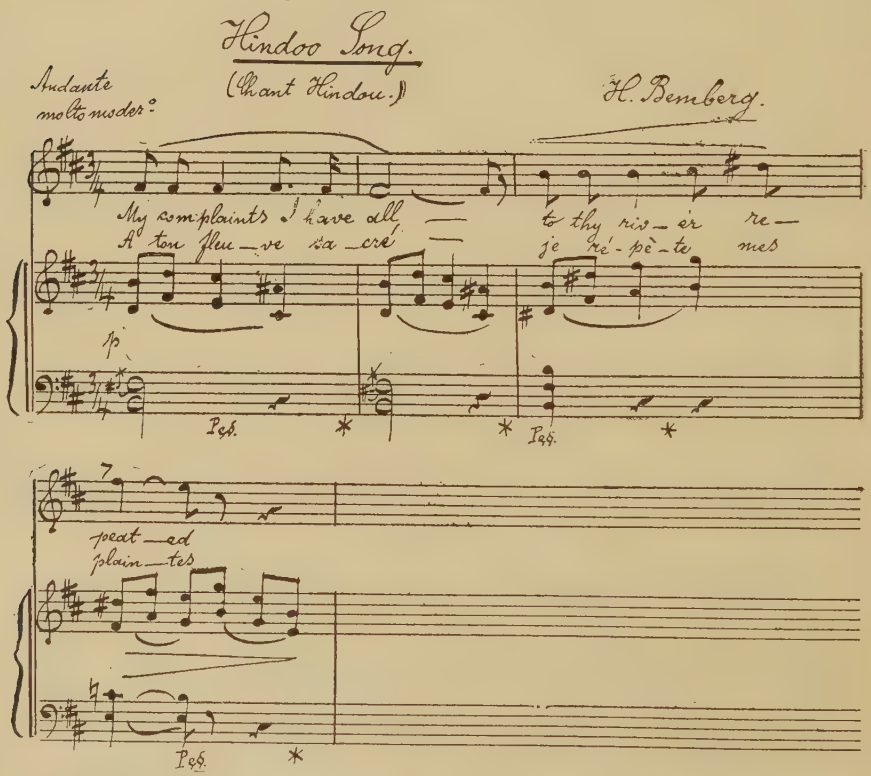
4

Relation of Phrasing to the Rhythm.

amine several songs, placing a comma after the note falling on the last syllable of each line, if the text be verse; if prose, on the note corresponding to the correct punctuation of each sentence. In a well-written song or aria such punctuation should correctly indicate the beginning and end of the musical phrases, yet it is surprising how often composers disregard so obvious a law.

2

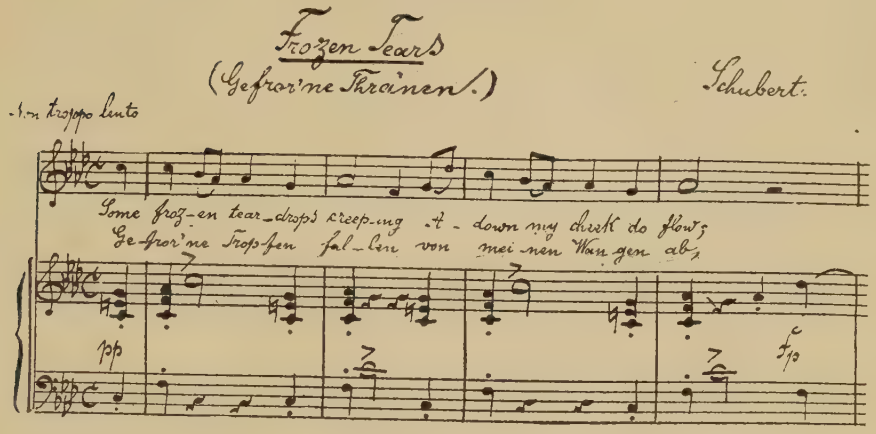
Example 19.



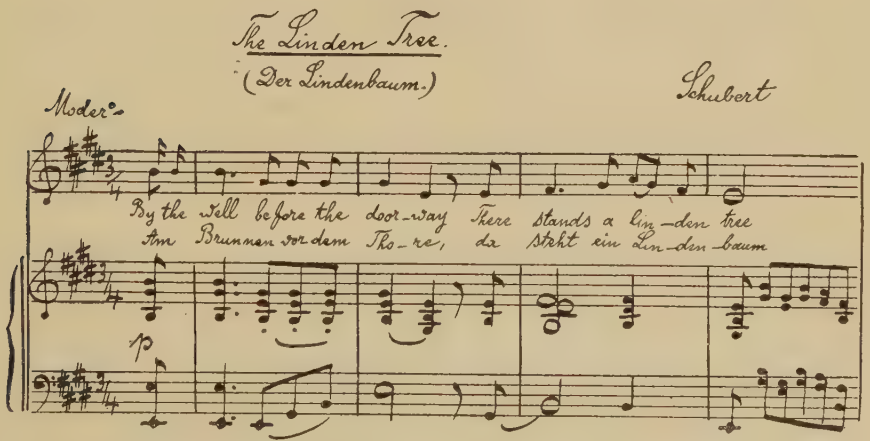
As there is no mark of punctuation in the text the rest in bar 2 is an unjustifiable break, and is usually disregarded by good singers.

The following Schubert examples show delightful accord between text and music:

Example 20.



Example 21.

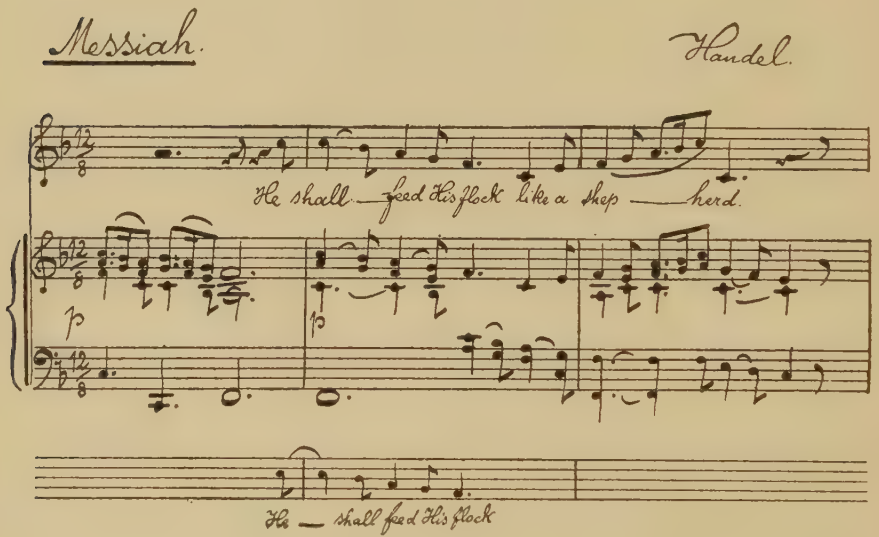


Sometimes by slightly transposing the position of words or syllables it is possible to correct discrepancies. It is not enough to merely match words to notes. Important words should be fitted to important notes wherever practicable, and certainly long syllables should coincide with accented notes. The following phrase from the Messiah is usually altered in the manner shown below. Handel frankly expressed his opinion that the "words are a nuisance," but as a foreigner writing in England such lapses

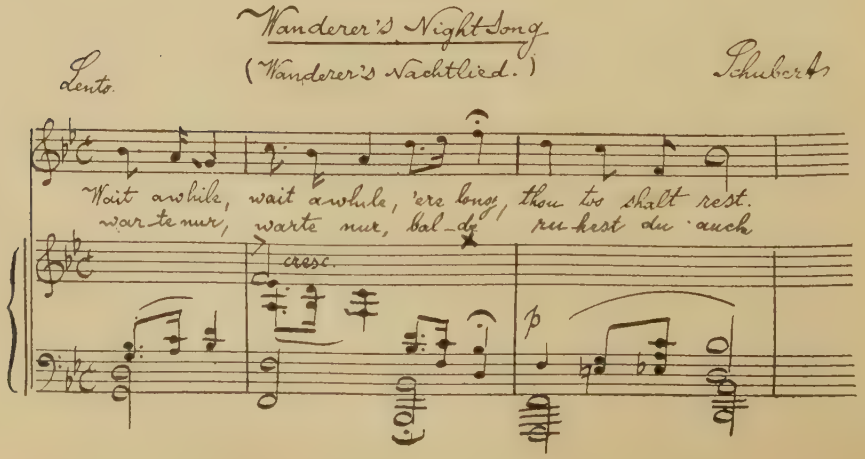
Coincidence Between Accented Notes and Text.

are pardonable. It is unlikely that he would have been guilty of them when setting his own language to music. The Germans have generally a fine instinct in this matter.

Example 22.

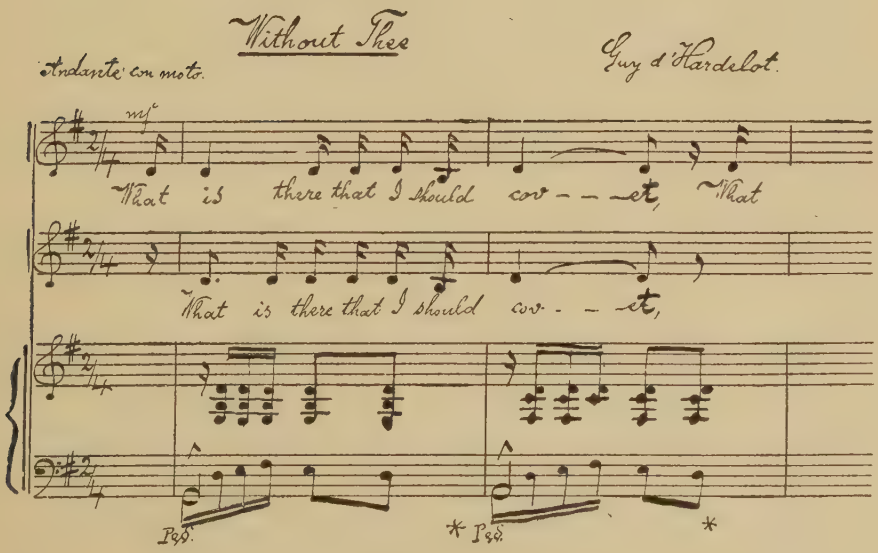


Example 23.

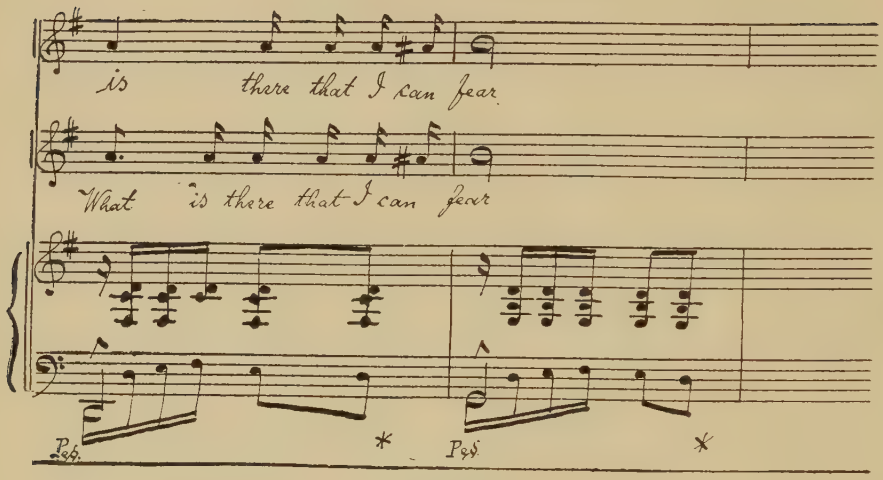


To pause upon the final syllable of such a word as "balde" is a lapse from this instinct as disappointing as it is unusual in Schubert's songs. It is difficult to suggest in this case any change. It is one of the exceptional cases where the punctuation of the translation is better suited to the music. Composers all too often set monosyllables of passing value to long notes or even to several notes. Sometimes it is an unimportant proposition such as "with" or "by," whose musical prolongation thwarts in the same manner the singer's every effort at correct enunciation. Though the utmost caution is to be recommended in changing what a composer has written, yet in cases like these something must be done. Sometimes a slight change in the musical detail suffices for this end.

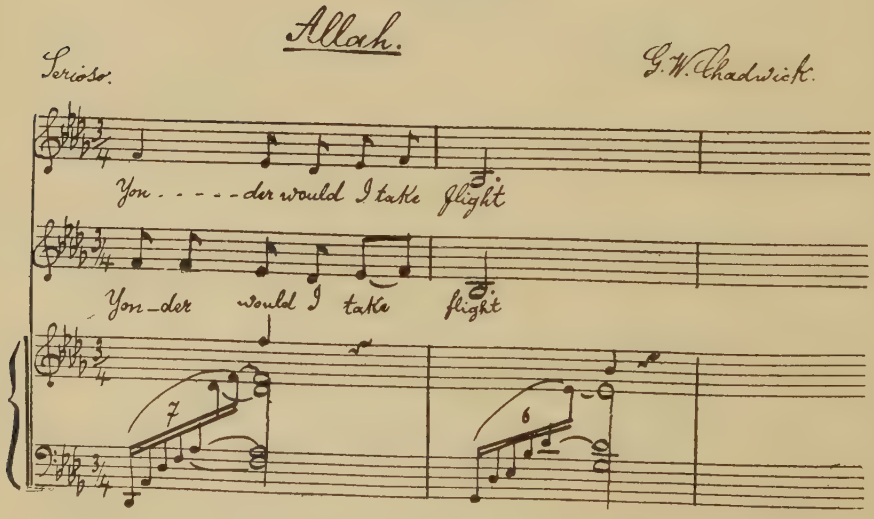
Example 24



Example 24—Continued.



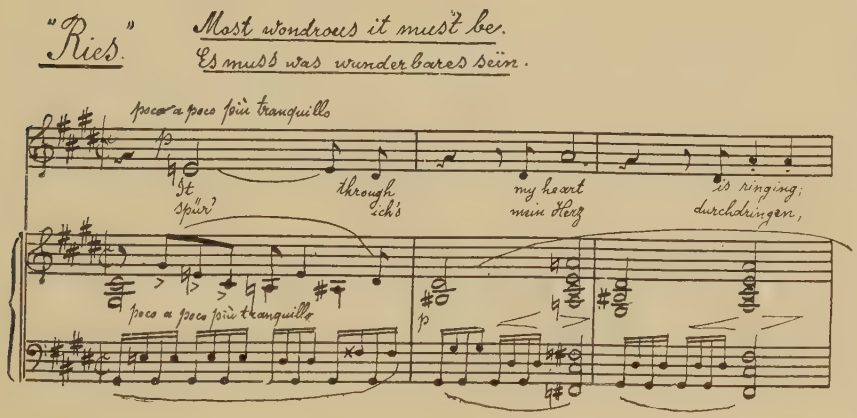
Example 25.



On the other hand, the discrepancy exists sometimes only in a poor translation from the original language of the text, and the composer is in

nowise to blame. The present fashion of program printing, giving the original words and an English version of songs in opposite columns, has revealed to the audience at many a song recital that, while a translation may conscientiously follow the musical metre, it seldom reproduces the atmosphere, and in many cases distorts the actual words of the original.

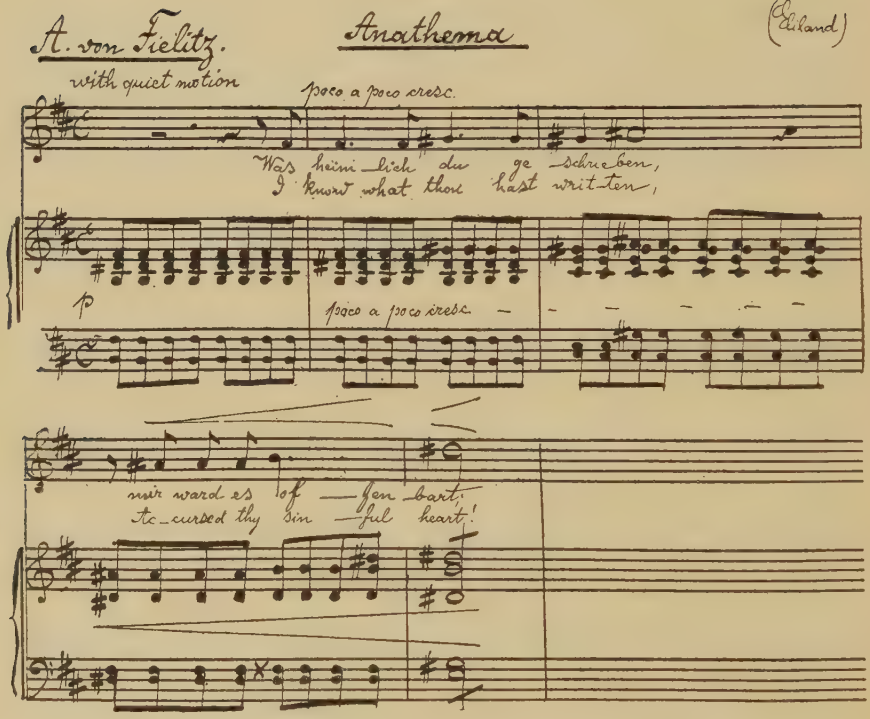
Example 26.



It must occur to any thoughtful student that in this passage from Ries' poetic little song the character of the music and the marking (poco a poco tranquillo) are at singular variance with the energetic statement: "It thro' my heart is ringing!" The composer is vindicated by reference to the German text, which reads: "I feel it penetrate my heart." It is difficult to understand why translators try, at all cost of sense and fitness, to match a foreign word with an English one of similar sound. We are directed to sing the following passage from the song cycle "Eliland" with a gradual crescendo, but with quiet motion. This marking is quite adequate. The text reads in the original: "What thou hast written in secret has been revealed to me;" nothing more or less. There is at this point no suggestion of the lurid phrase "Accursed thy sinful heart."

Inadequate Translations.

Example 27.



Knowledge of Languages Essential.

Taking these facts into consideration, we cannot escape the conclusion that a singer who aims at becoming an artist should have, over and above his technical equipment, an intimate knowledge of languages. Expression in singing must be actually interpretive of the text; but how can the executant hope to reproduce the subtle shades of meaning in a poem of whose general drift he has but a cursory understanding? It is surely not sufficient to acquire the correct pronunciation parrot fashion, or even a literal translation of a poem in a foreign language—a poem brimming, perhaps, with passion, pain, or renunciation. The singer must make the inner meaning of a song his own, and form his artistic concept at first hand, if his work is to be vital and convincing. Then let him sing it

in the original, and his audience, however ignorant of the grammatical details, will not miss its emotional import. Every language is full of delicate detail—most difficult, frequently impossible, to translate. For example, there is the lovely little Franz song " Sunday " (Edition Peters').

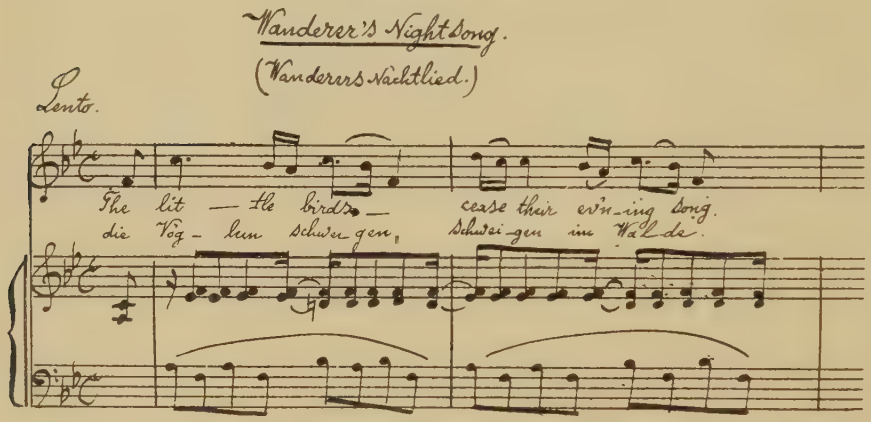
The night had scarcely faded—	[In the German the word for "faded" is so connected with flowers that the impression given is " The night had just faded like a flower."]
Only one tuneful lark alone Poured forth her mellow tone. Whom greets she thus so early? And round the house, reflecting, The stately trees all stand, Gaze o'er the silent land, As if some one expecting. The flowers all are standing, In holiday attire, Bright dew-drops in their hair, Like children, something wanding I thought: Ye brides so tiny, Why are ye decked so gay? One looked as if to say: Hush! hush! to-day is Sunday; The morning bells are pealing. Soon will our gracious God Go through the sacred wood. I listened, humbly kneeling.	[German reads: " Only one lark sang along the still air."] [" Wanding " is a word whose meaning must be left to the poetic imagination. It is not in the dictionary.] [German: " The *dear* God."] [In the original it reads: " Then I knelt, happily startled," as if at the sight of something unexpectedly beautiful.]

This is only one of many examples. A metrical translation which shall rhyme and adequately present the atmosphere of the original is clearly impossible; for the construction of sentences varies in every language: One sentence in the poem just examined reads, literally: " In holiday attire, like a band of children, dew-pearls in their hair, the flowers all were standing — I thought, etc." The translator made a laudable effort in transposing the clauses to keep important words in proper co-ordination with the notes, even to the manufacture of the word " wanding " for a vacancy; but with inevitably deplorable results. Surely since we cannot have translations by Tieck, or the brothers Von Schlegel, who rendered such a service to Germany by their wonderful translation of Shakspeare into that language, it were better to sing everything in the original language for the benefit of the singer and of the few that

understand. Better a perfect interpretation offered to those capable of appreciating it than a mangled version giving absolute enjoyment to no one.

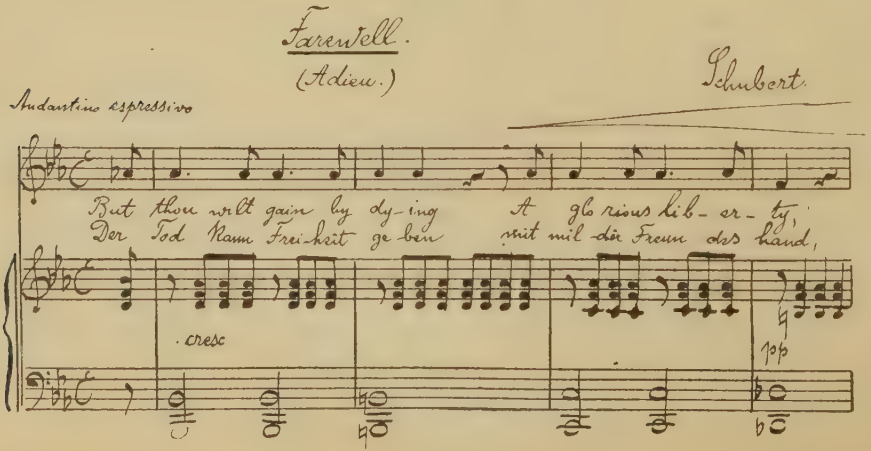
The incidents of a song are of less importance than the details that indicate the emotional mood. In translations it is always the atmosphere that is sacrificed.

Example 28.



The German reads "The little birds are silent in the wood." In the English version the wood is not mentioned, nor does it occur elsewhere in the song. Think of the difference made in any landscape by the the removal of a wood!

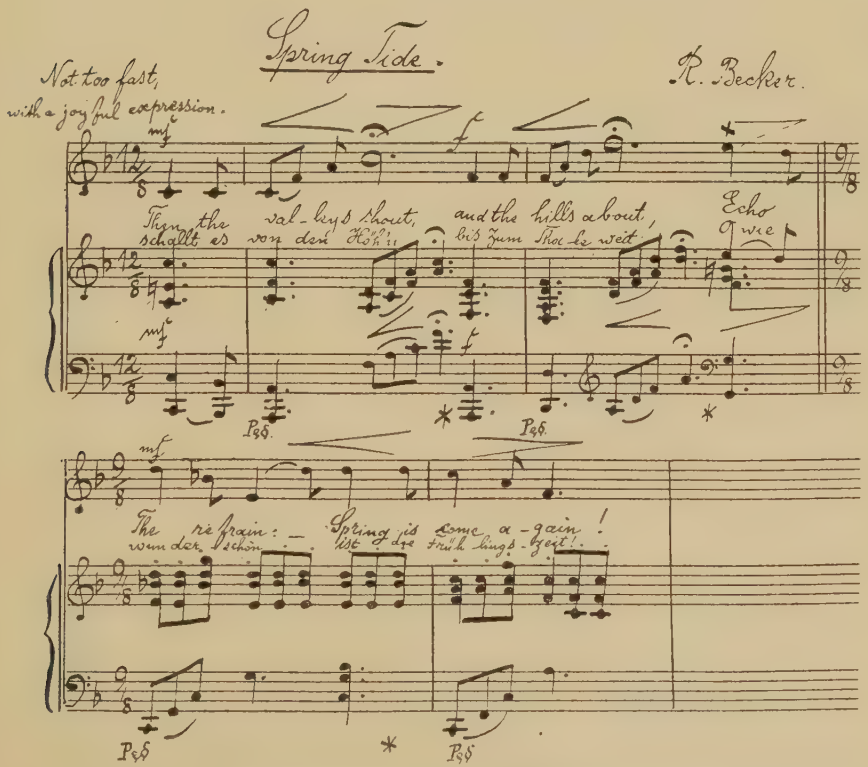
Example 29.



In the above example the meaning is distorted by the introduction of the word "glorious," which is foreign to the whole color of the music as well as of the poem. It is only necessary to compare the translation as it stands with the original: "But death can give you freedom with gentle, friendly hand."

The following is a particularly awkward piece of work. The refrain really begins just before the double bar on E.

Example 30.



When it has been ascertained that the musical phrases are correctly coincident with the text, the student has made himself acquainted with the barest outline or framework of the necessary accentuation of a song;

for while correct phrasing stands in a higher relationship to the spirit of the composition than metrical accent, correct phrasing in this restricted sense would present but an outline of the composer's thought, and there would still be lacking many qualities of warmth and significance which reveal the soul. There are accents which, for want of a better term, may be called *dramatic,* as their proper use, together with the tone color (over and above the proportionate recognition of minor laws), gives the final, vitalizing touch to interpretation which raises it above a mere reading from the text of the composer to a musical appeal from the mind and heart of the singer himself to the corresponding musical sense in his audience.

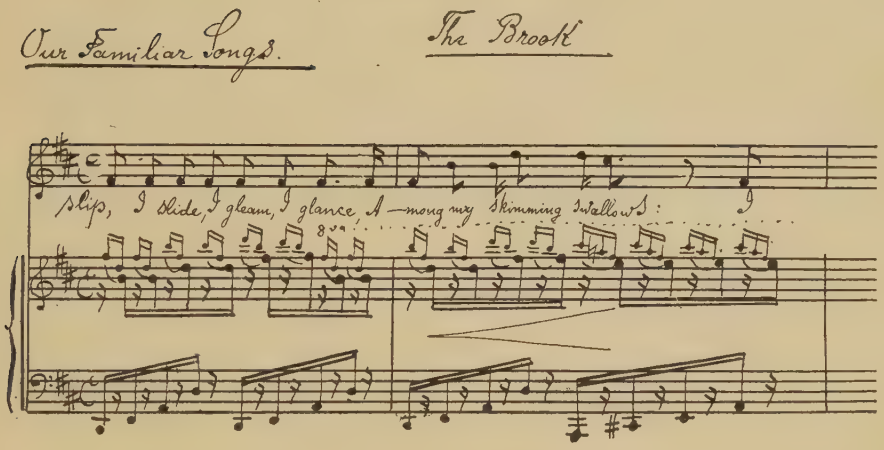
The Dramatic Accents.

It may easily occur to the intelligent student who has given due attention to time, phrasing, and the variations in speed and sonority indicated by the general musical structure (crescendo and accelerando in ascending and the reverse in descending passages), to compare the texts, written and musical, and thus place his main climax correctly, and perhaps the minor climaxes as well. This will enable him to render a song or aria with more or less dramatic force; yet in spite of the wonderful assistance of talent and musical instinct his utterance will be that of a child in comparison to that of the artist who, having studied the details of dramatic accentuation and tone color, is master of the subtlest elements of the power at his command; for, strange as it may seem, even these higher elements lie in the domain of law, and rules may be formulated for their most effective use.

The simplest of the dramatic accents is that upon the reiterated note. Every repetition of a note should, as a rule, increase in intensity. This is founded upon obvious reasoning. It would be absurd for a person to repeat the same thought or the same word unless for added stress. In order to say "NO" with especial emphasis one would not say: "No, No, No," but "No, No, **No.**"

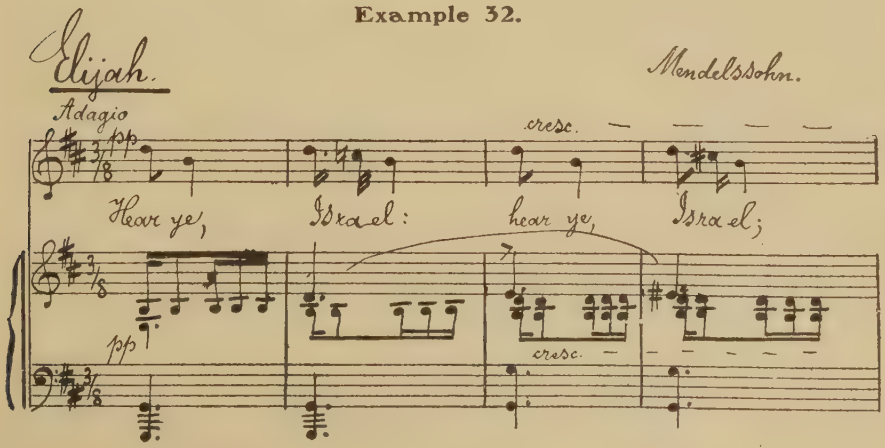
5 **Rule for Repetitions.**

Example 31.

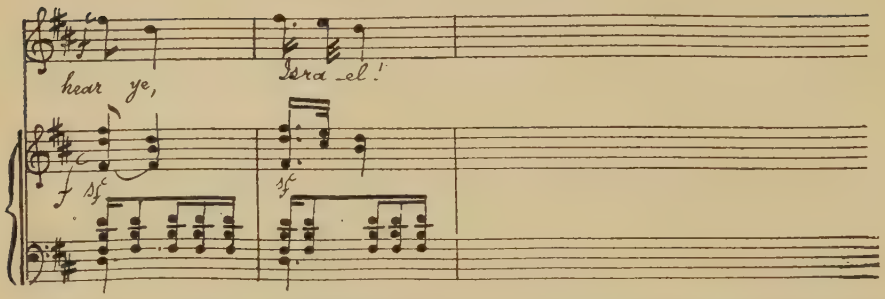


6 This rule applies equally to phrases which are either repeated or which follow one another in sequence. Such passages generally require a strong crescendo and accelerando leading up to a climax of intensity.

Example 32.



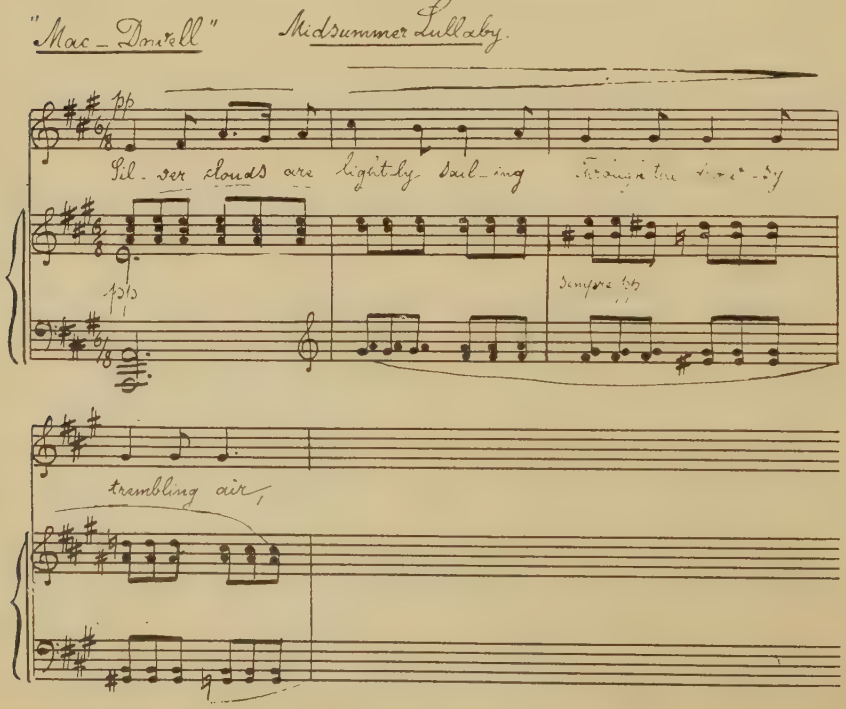
Example 32—Continued.



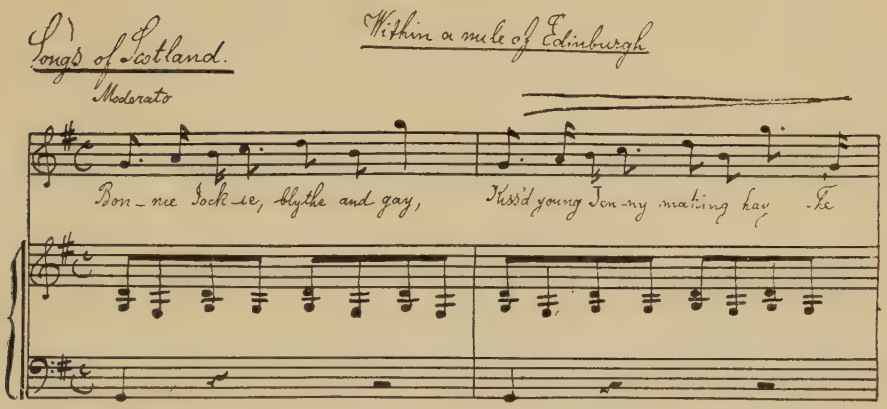
7 **Weaker Repetitions.**

Yet there are many exceptional cases where such repetition implies merely an echo, a memory, or some sentiment suggestive of softness and delicacy. The singer may easily determine, by reference to the text, to which class any given passage belongs. The words rather than the marking of the composer must be followed.

Example 33.



Example 34.



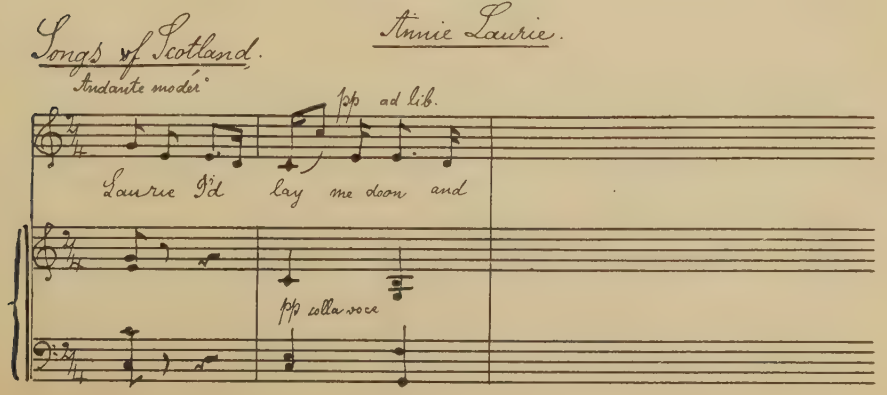
It has been sufficiently explained that phrases or passages which depart in any way from the normal rule either in time or structure demand particular emphasis, and this rule extends to single notes having any special structural or musical significance. There is for instance a

8

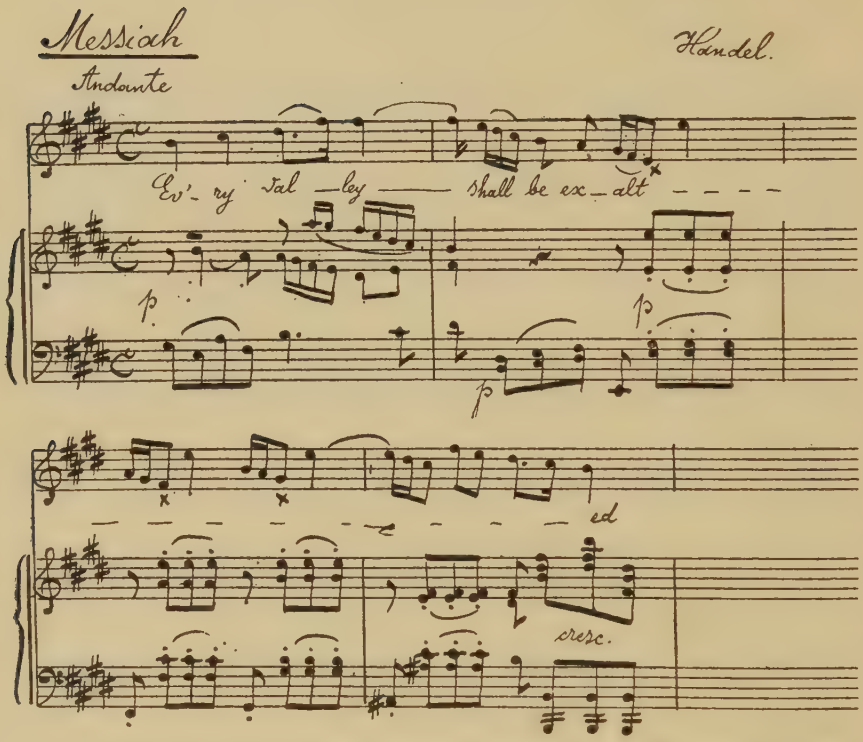
Pressure on Low Note.

pressure upon any low note followed by direct transition to a much higher note or passage. This is based upon physical law: the higher the jump the stronger the push to require the necessary impetus. We may revert to the illustration of the ball which is thrown down with more or less force according to the height of rebound desired. To overlook this simple rule is to rob many passages of all emphasis.

Example 35.



Example 36.

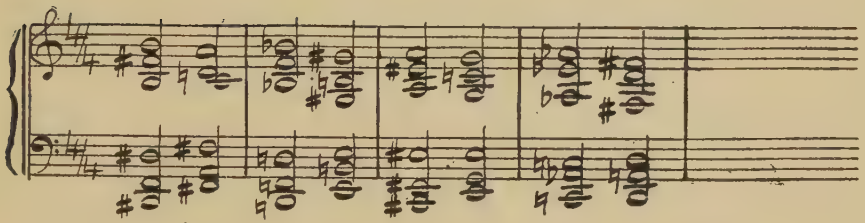


Attention is called to the harmonic rule quoted on page 30; that a period must end upon the keynote or "tonic," as this note is the only one capable of giving the impression of final repose. The smallest musical thought in order to be symmetrical and to stand alone must include two elements in addition to the actual phrase structure — time and *tonality*. A passage deprived of its tonality gives it as indefinite an impression as one robbed of its rhythm. Wagner makes use of this fact in some of his most characteristic motives, as Krehbiel points out in his charming book "Studies in the Wagnerian Drama," page 24. We cannot do better than use his first illustration, *i. e.*, the passage in Siegfried descriptive of Wotan in his character of Wanderer.

Tonality.

Example 37.

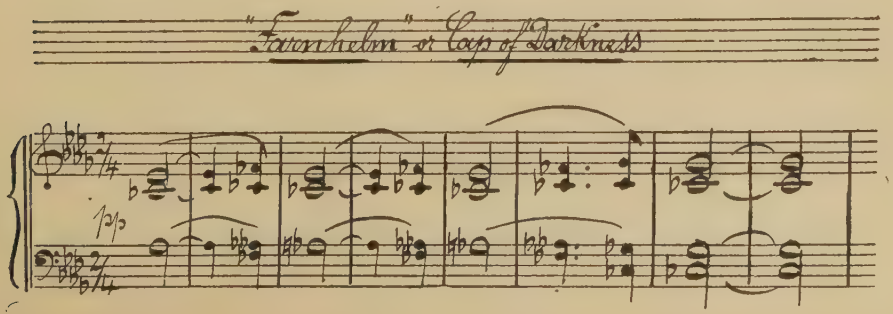
Wanderer Motive.



The instrumental color is the same as that of the stately Valhalla motive, the rhythm is dignified and solid; but if we play the passage we realize at once that it is in no key, and receive the intended impression of restlessness. Mr. Krehbiel also mentions the phrase used throughout the Tetrology to describe the Tarnhelm, or cap of darkness, and we quote his words concerning it.

"This phrase is not often used, but wherever it occurs in the music its mysteriousness arrests attention. What is the source of that mysteriousness? Nothing else than indefiniteness, vagueness of mode. The closing harmony is an empty fifth; we do not know whether it is major or minor, because the determining interval is lacking. Supply a major third and it is major, a minor third and it is minor; in either case, however, the mystical property of the phrase, the element which establishes its propriety, vanishes."

Example 38.



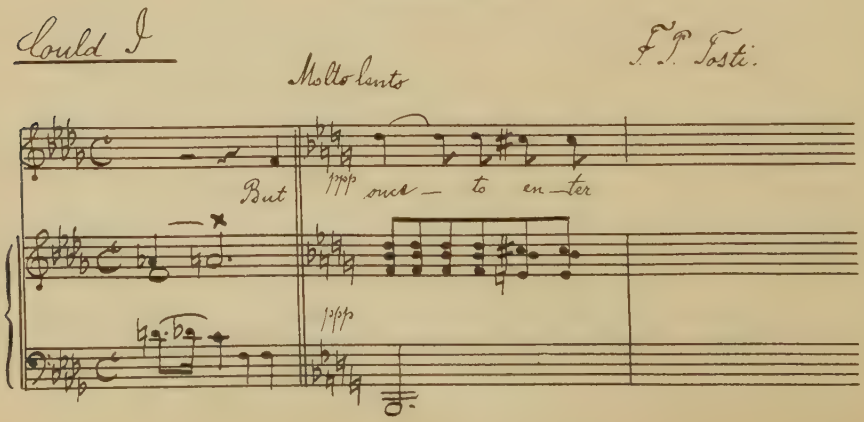
This necessity for defining key and mode is the foundation of a rule seldom taken into consideration except by the most thoughtful of musicians, though instinctively practised by many. *The third of the scale and the seventh should always be slightly pressed;* the third because of its importance in determining the mode (major or minor), and the seventh because it always leads directly to the keynote, standing in the relative position in music that anticipation does in life. Because of this harmonic attraction to the keynote the seventh is called the Leading Tone. In major the third has almost as strong an upward tendency as the seventh, and unless the harmonic inclination of these two notes is mentally recognized by the singer they will always sound flat to the discriminating listener even though he may not know why.

9 **Two Harmonically Important Notes.**

All modulatory passages or notes should be emphasized. That is to say, all passages or notes leading to a change of key or mode. "Modulation is the process by which one key or mode is exchanged for another. This process consists in general, in introducing one or more foreign notes into the original scale, whereby the position of the semitones and their relation to the tonic are changed, so that the harmonic and melodic functions and tendencies of each chord and tone of the original scale are defined according to a new basis." (Goetschius' System of Harmony.)

4 **Modulation.**

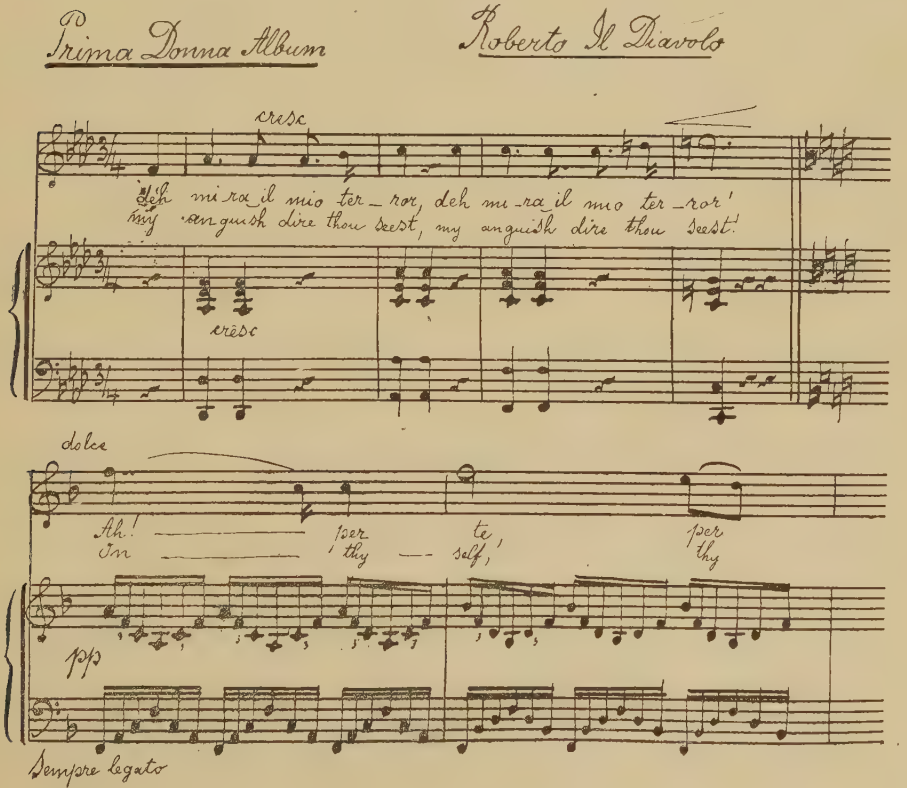
Example 39.



In the first measure of the above example A flat is proper to the key D flat major. It is raised to A natural, which is the leading tone of the scale B flat major, and that key ensues.

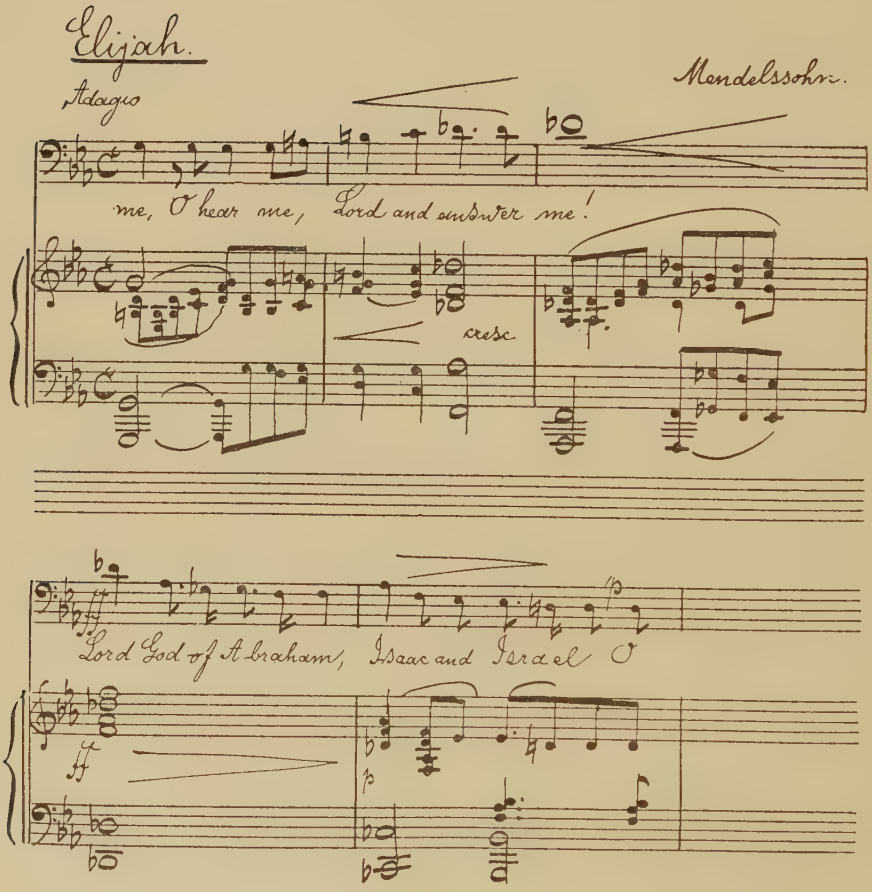
The following example is equally obvious. In the third measure D natural prepares the ear for E natural — the leading tone of the key F major which it introduces.

Example 40.



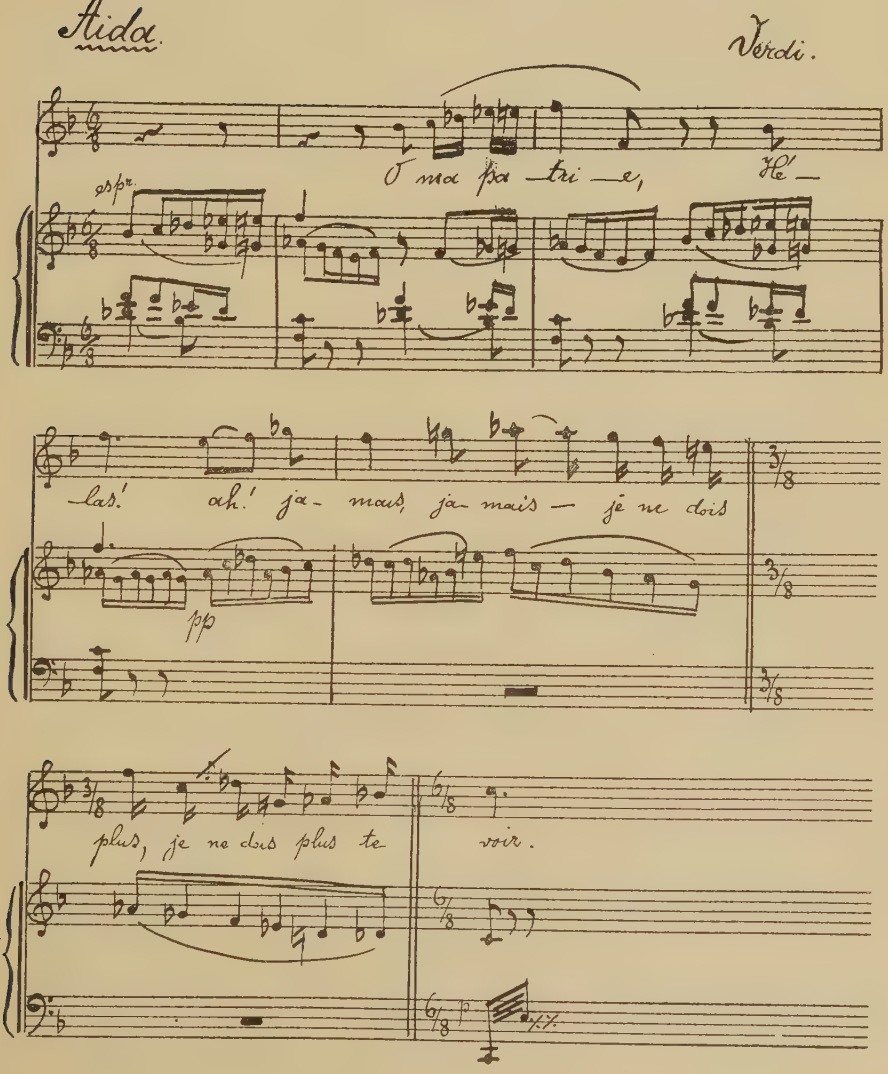
The key of this example from Elijah is E flat major. At this point we find ourselves temporarily in the relative minor, and at the third beat of the second measure we plunge suddenly to the key D flat which becomes fully established in bar four.

Example 41.



Thus it is seen that all dissonances, or notes foreign to the main key are accented somewhat, unless they are very clearly of an incidental or passing character, such as runs, rapid chromatic passages, etc. The two following examples show two varieties of incidental dissonances:

Example 42.



Aida. Verdi.

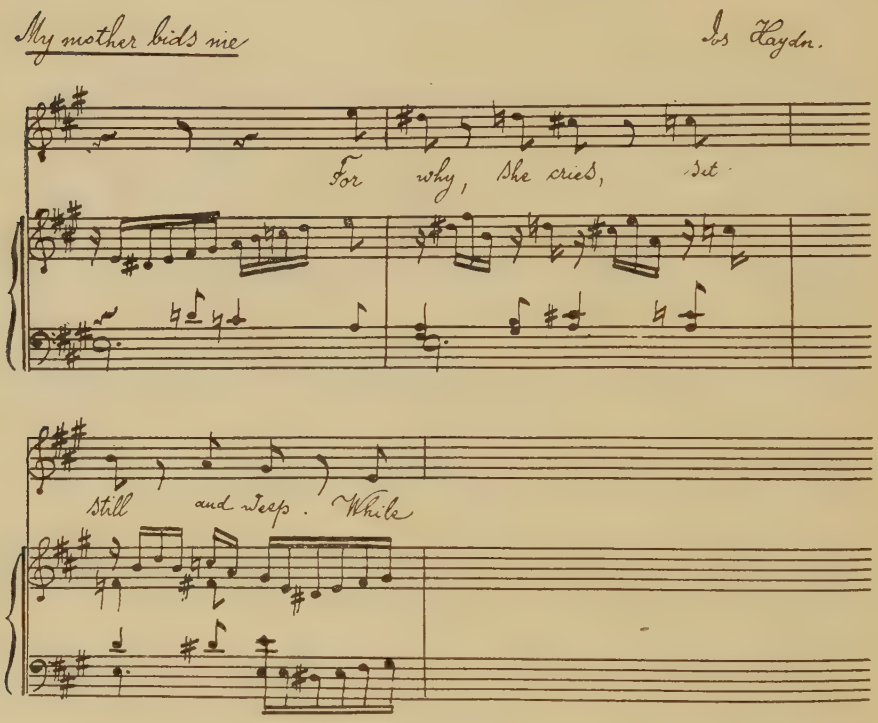
espr.

O ma pa-tri-e, Hé-las! ah! ja-mais, ja-mais — je ne dois plus, je ne dois plus te voir.

pp

p

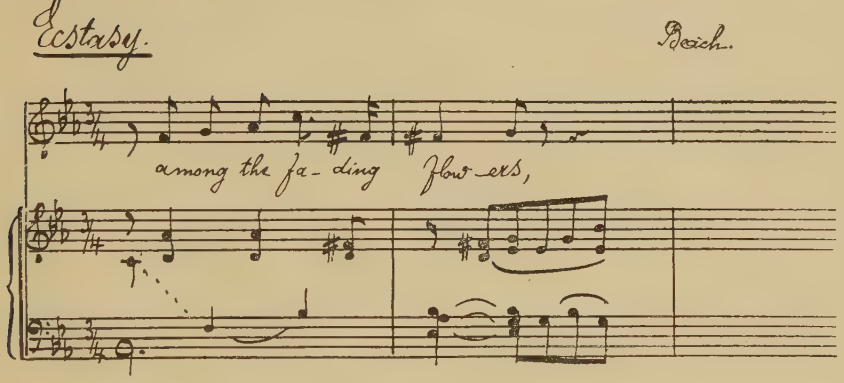
Example 43.



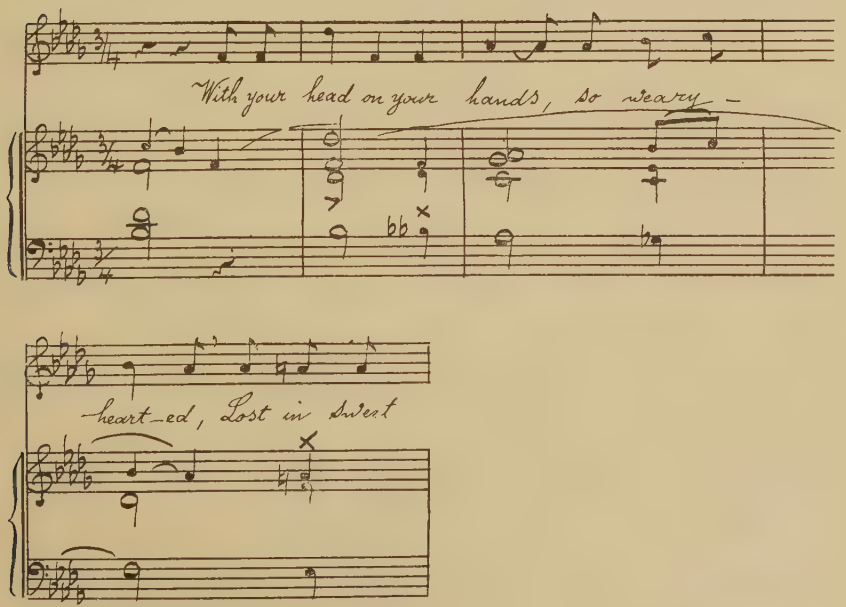
It may be easily determined whether or not a dissonance is modulatory in character by the chord which follows it. As foreign notes tend to modulation (that is, to the scale in which they normally belong), they are shown to be merely casual alterations if followed by chords unmistakably belonging to the original key, such as those containing the leading tone, fifth, fourth, etc

Passing Dissonances.

Example 44.



Example 45.

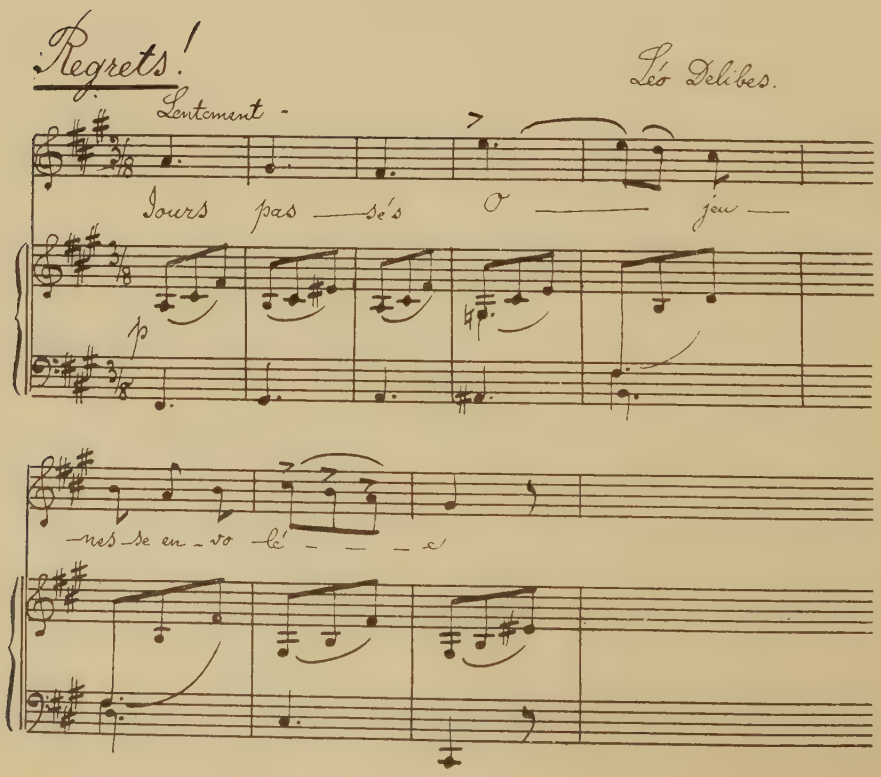


In the measures from Mrs. Beach's song "Ecstasy" there is no modulation. The equivocal F sharp is immediately followed by the tonic chord of the key. In the Tosti example, however, B double flat in bar 2 leads to the relative major key, and A natural in the last bar given is leading back to D minor in which the song is written.

10 **Minor Intervals.**

If the composition be written in minor some of its longer intervals should be accented, as they are in a sense but an alteration of the stronger major mode to which the ear is more accustomed. See bar 4 of following example.

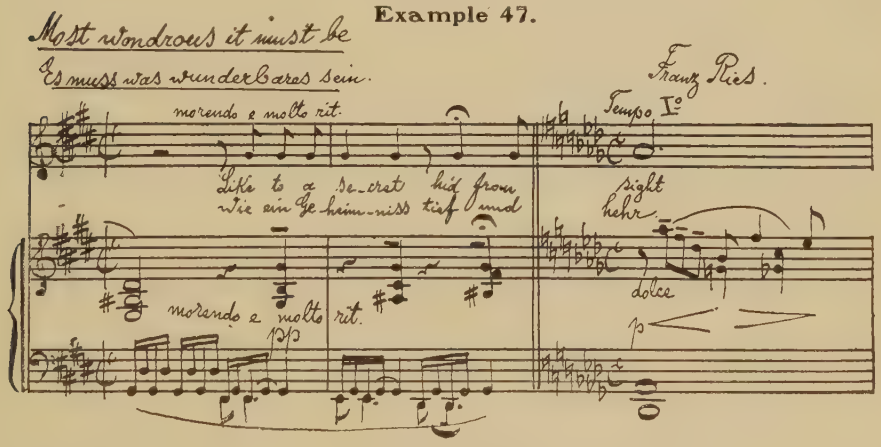
Example 46.



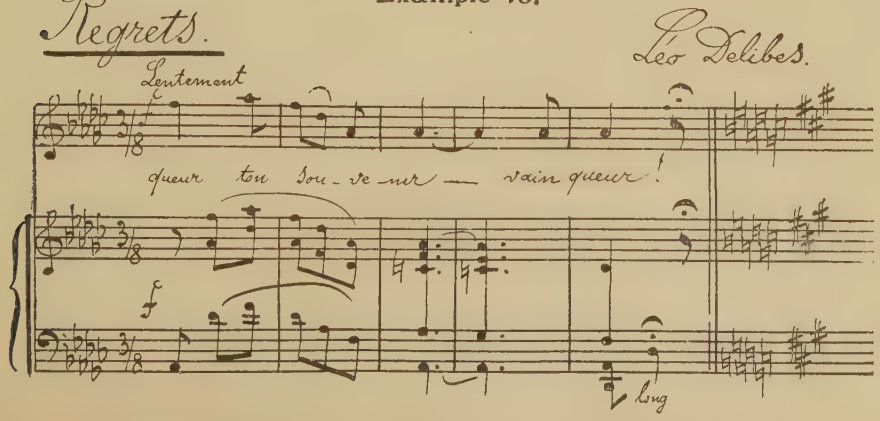
Enharmonic Changes.

Sometimes a modulation is effected enharmonically, that is by changing the musical notation of a note or chord while leaving it the same in sound. It is evident that D flat, considered as C sharp would have an altogether different melodic trend, and point to a different key. In the second measure of the next example G sharp in the last chord is regarded as A flat, the fifth of the key D flat major, and used to introduce that key. In example 48, again, from Delibes's "Regrets," D flat in bar 5 is counted as C sharp, and brings in the key of F sharp minor in exactly the same way.

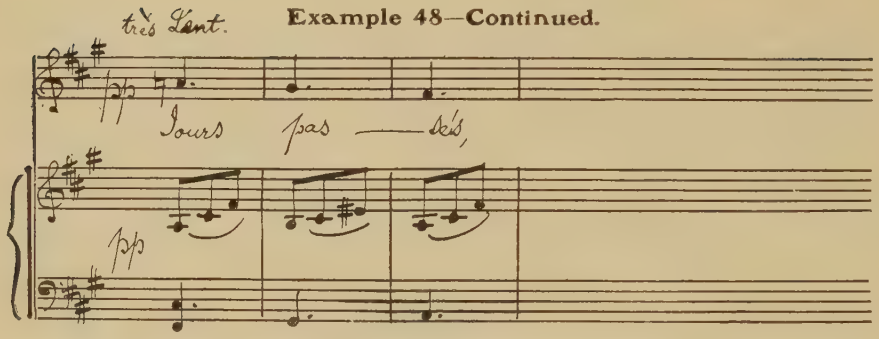
Example 47.



Example 48.



Example 48—Continued.



Tone Color.

Such changes of key should be not only accented, but emphasized by a change of tone color as well. Methods of varying the tone color come under the head of voice production, and are outside the scope of the present treatise. The judicious coloring of any given passage is the last touch of emotional significance. It forms a bond between music and text, doing much to induce that dramatic throb which is final and convincing.

Distinguishing Mood of Songs.

As O. B. Boise aptly says in his recent book, "Music and Its Masters": "Each intrinsically great composition has its distinguishing mood or temperament which is the sequential expression and perpetuation of an emotion." Our aim as interpreters must be to present this emotion to our audience clearly and coherently, adding to the thought of poet and composer only the inevitable color of our own temperament: that stamp of sincerity which convinces our hearers that the song through which we picture joy, sorrow, or love, truly expresses these things to us.

A thorough study of the text is the first step toward determining this predominant mood. The singer as well as the song composer should be more than a musician, for song is more than music. It is a double art: a combination of speech and music, or rather poetry and music, since, with the exception of passages from the Bible, music is hardly ever set to prose. In view of this acknowledged duality of song it should not be necessary to point out the propriety of distinct enunciation and an intelligent reading of the text. If words are used at all, the preservation of the sense should be the first consideration; yet this self-

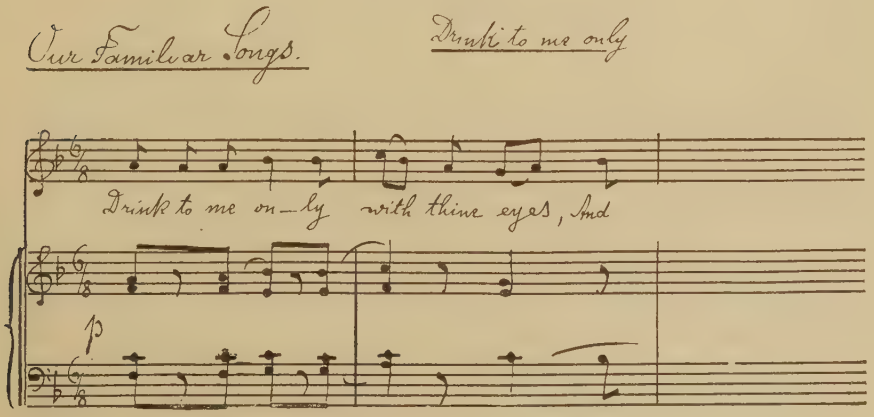
evident necessity is lost sight of by many vocal teachers and singers. A friend told the writer recently that she had heard that familiar song, "The Rosary," by Nevin, given by four concert singers, all well known, before she understood the poem or even gained an inkling of what it was about. Vague discussions concerning "diction" show a certain awakening of critics to this fault, but also the chronic tendency of musicians to relegate the minutiae of their art to the domain of mysticism. Now the study of diction is not mysterious, moreover it is of the first importance. It should begin with the first lesson in the rudiments of voice production, and — considering that the singer is never through acquiring new languages — never stop.

1

Diction. Diction is the application to music of the rules of elocution. It has been called the elocution of singing, but it is more than that. Good diction is the proper co-ordination of rules elocutionary and musical. The foundation of elocution is enunciation, but elocutionary rules of enunciation cannot be applied to song; pronunciation, however, and emphasis, are the same in good reading and good singing. The difference between enunciation in speech and in song need scarcely be demonstrated; every student of the elements of voice production is aware of the conditions of musical enunciation. One simple example is, however, appended for the benefit of the possible lay reader.

Enunciation.

Example 49.



In reading this passage it is evident that little, if any more time is given to one vowel than to another, and that the consonants enjoy an equal attention, whereas in singing, each vowel is more or less protracted (according to the melody), and the consonants act merely as propellers or as connectives. It is, however, equally evident that the pronunciation of the words remains unchanged. We do not say withe for "with" nor oiz for "eyes." We may be thankful that, in this case, we are not obliged by the composer's carelessness to do so. (See Example 22, page 34.)

Progressive Interpretation.

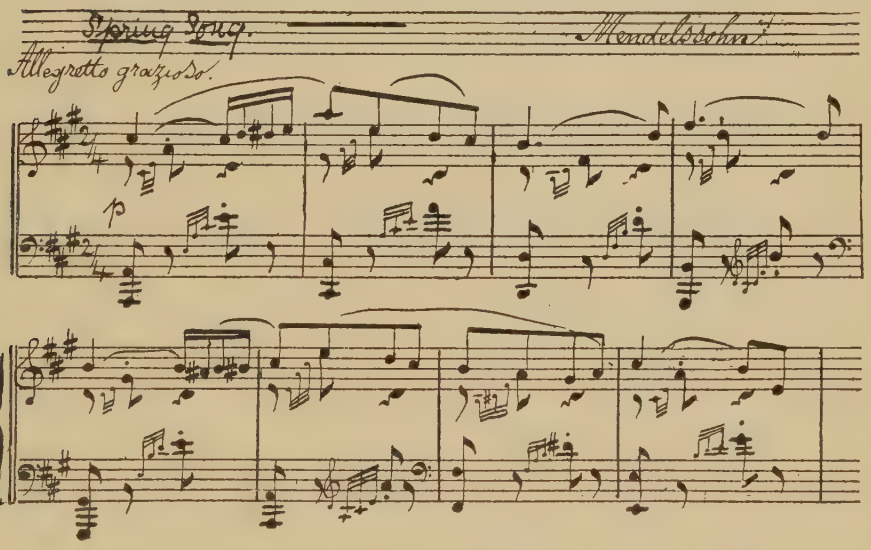
After primary study of the text comes that of the music, as a whole and then in detail. The inflection of the reading voice is replaced by the melody, and when the phrasing, or let us say when poetic and musical punctuation, is determined, the larger expression marks according to the musical structure may be put in (crescendo in ascending, and the reverse in descending passages). Each climax must be correctly placed and the framework of expression, so to speak, be arranged in harmony with the instinctive requirements of the mind for proportion, symmetry, contrast, etc. Here the crescendo must be of the slightest, as the melodic rise is but incidental and leads to nothing of immediate importance, though as the melodic trend continues upward it cannot be omitted; in another place it must be stronger: the feeling is really intensified; and here at last it is the direct preparation for the main climax—that cry of passion, exultation, joy, or perhaps of pain and grief, sinking through a despairing diminuendo to renunciation.

The correct apportionment of the crescendo and diminuendo points (as was earlier explained) to the placing of corresponding accelerando and ritenuto signs; not equally marked of necessity, but adapted to the momentary need. We repeat that there is no crescendo without an accompanying accelerando, but, as a general thing, the variation in speed is less defined than that in tone. It requires more cogent reasons to disturb the rhythm to any great extent. Of course, there are cases where the marked accelerando and ritenuto are equally essential; for instance, in Spring Songs, when the music usually expresses not only the gradual awakening of Nature, but its effervescent energy, the bursting into bloom, and into accelerated life and joy and — song. It is interesting to note

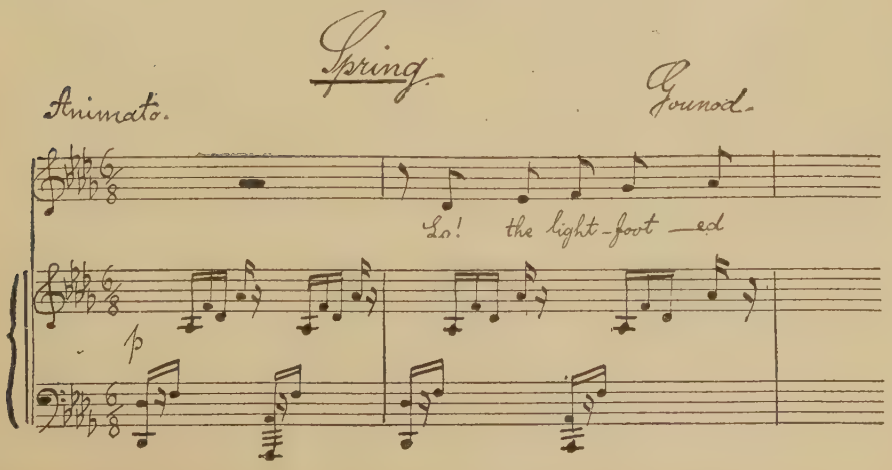
Upward Impulse of Spring Songs. (Life.)

the similarity of means used by composers of different nationality, education and environment to express the primitive impulses of Spring.

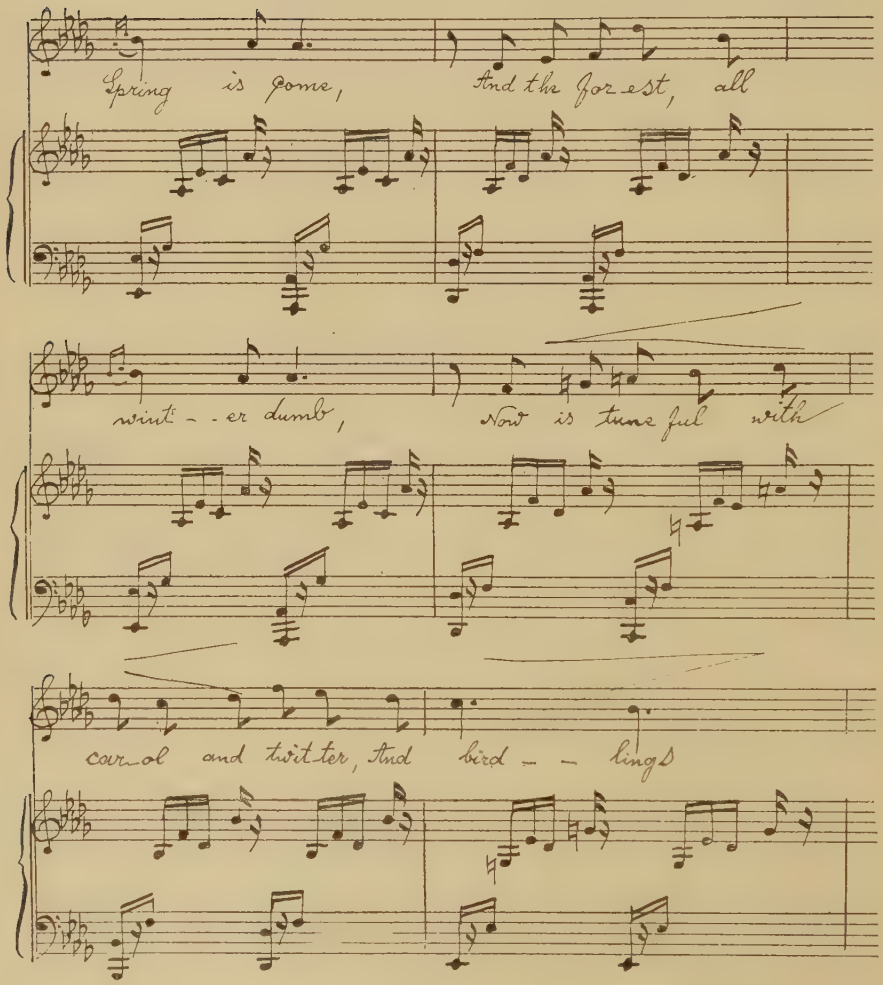
Example 50.



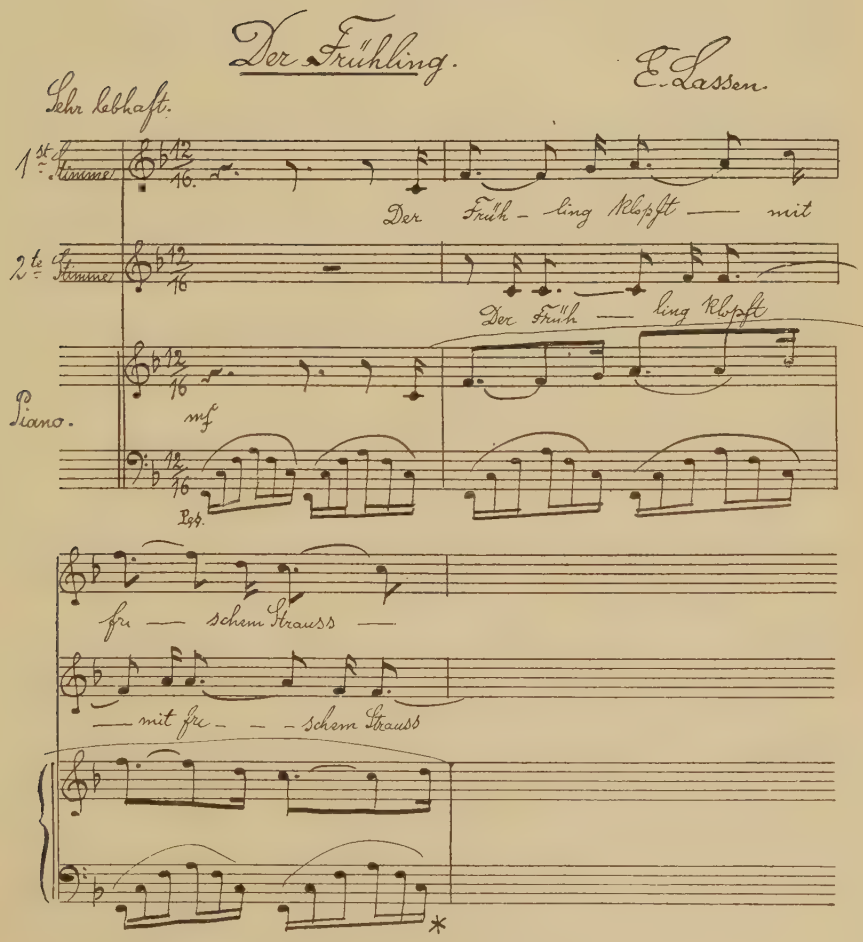
Example 51.



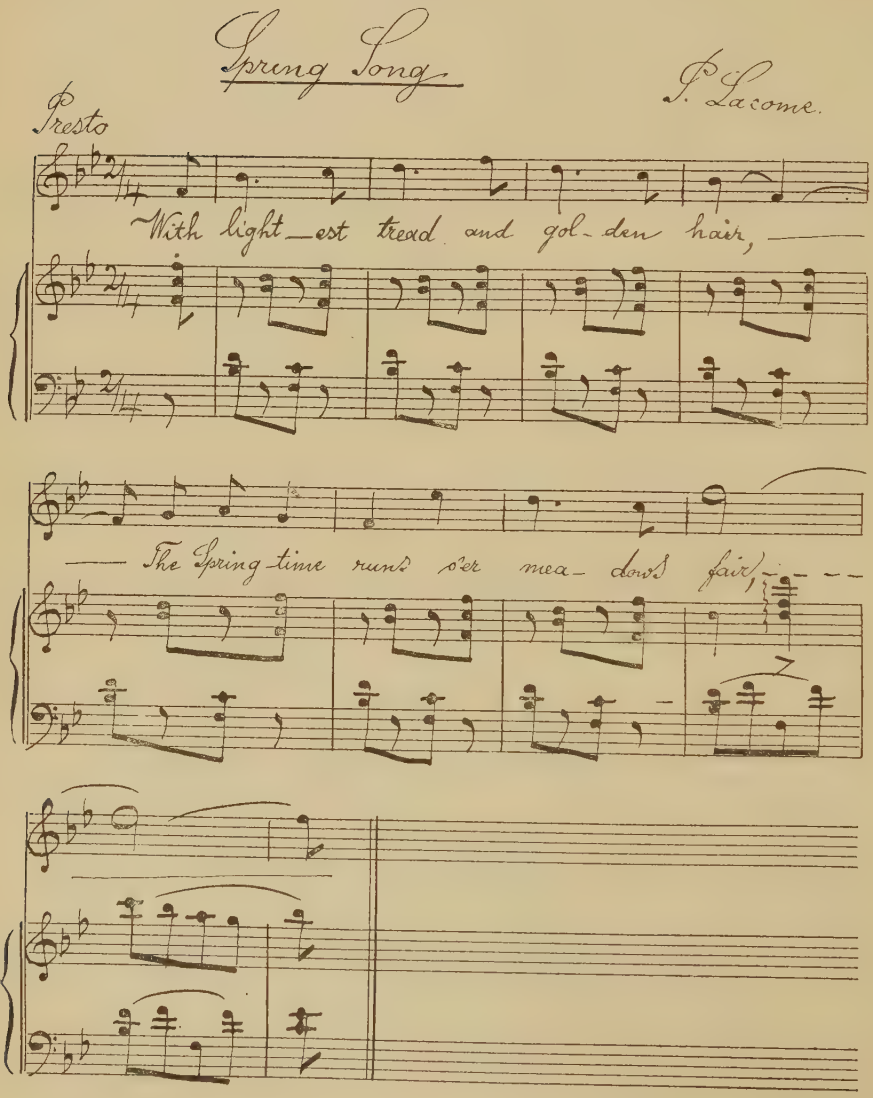
Example 51—Continued.



Example 52.


Der Frühling.
E. Lassen.
Sehr lebhaft.
1ste Stimme
2te Stimme
Piano.
mf
Der Früh — ling klopft — mit
Der Früh — ling klopft
fre — schem Strauss —
— mit fre — — schem Strauss

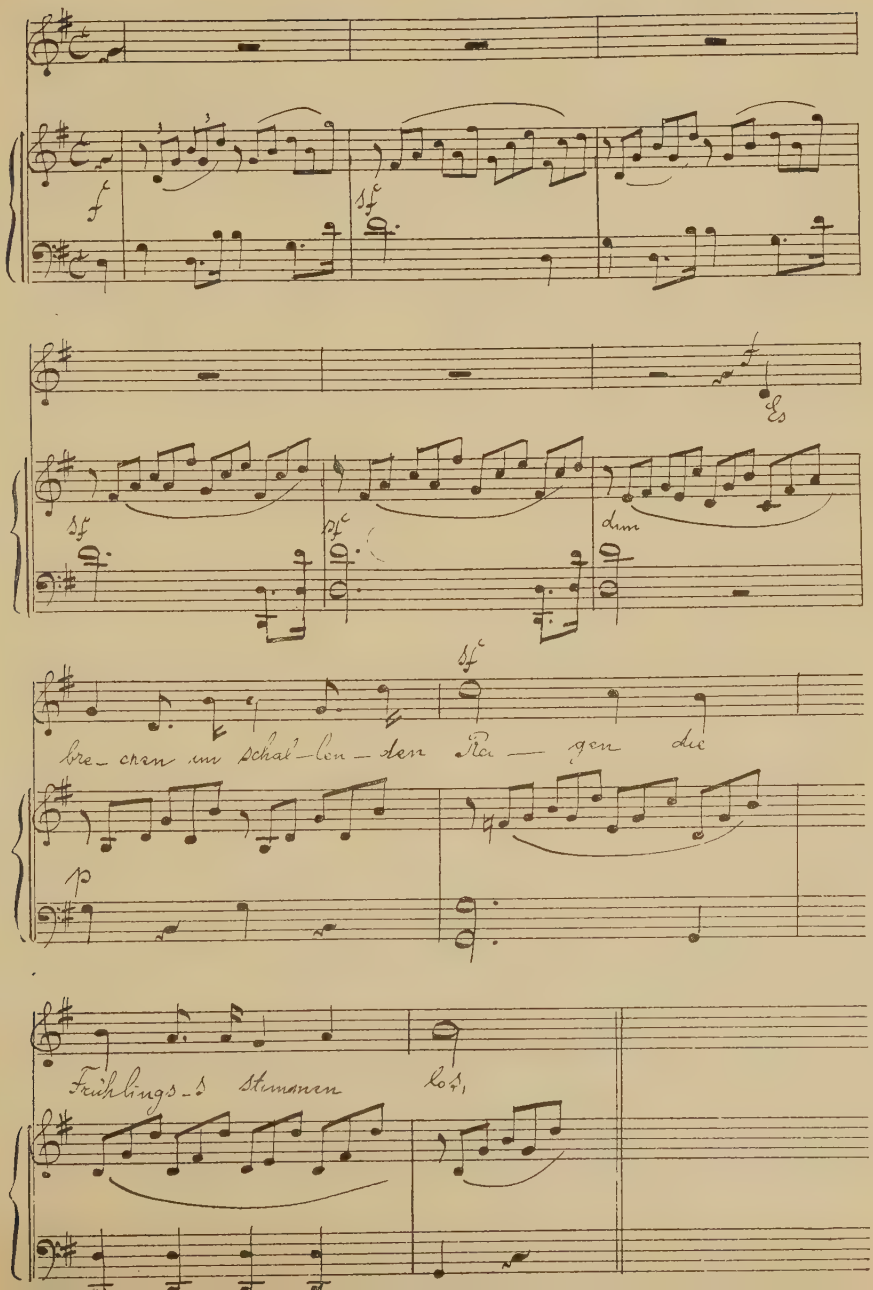
Example 53.


Spring Song
J. Lacome.
Presto
With light-est tread and gol-den hair,
The Spring-time runs o'er mea-dows fair,

Frühlingslied.

All: vivace.

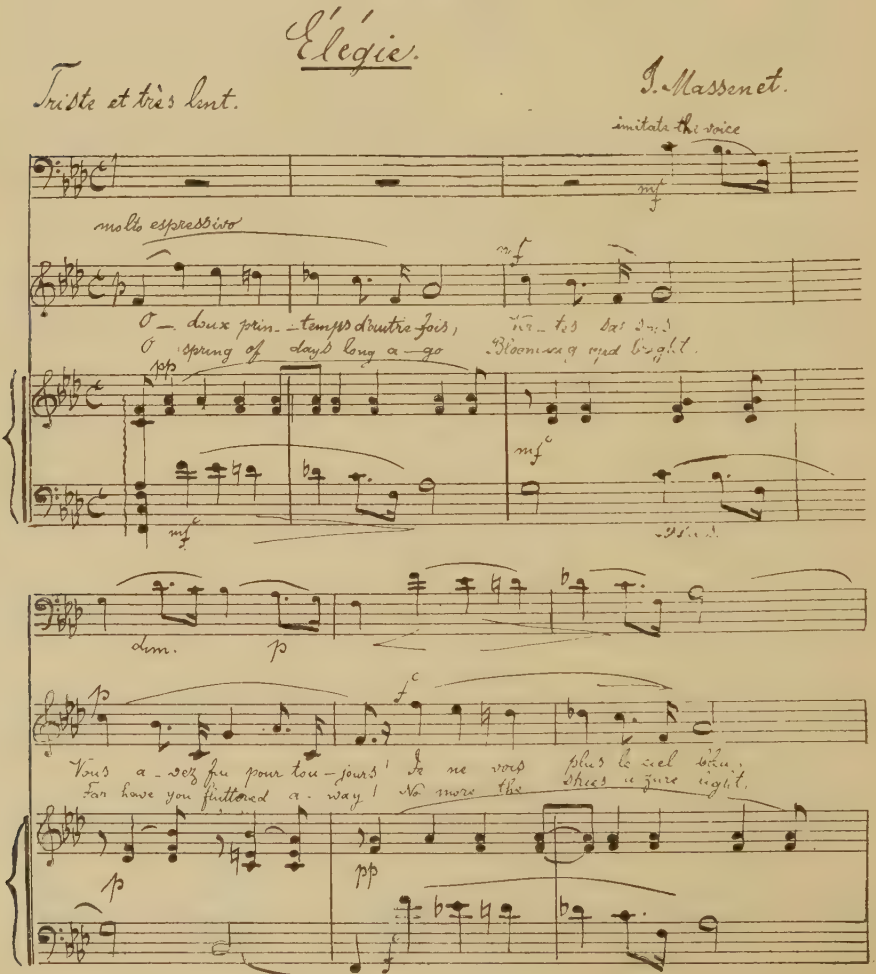
Mendelssohn



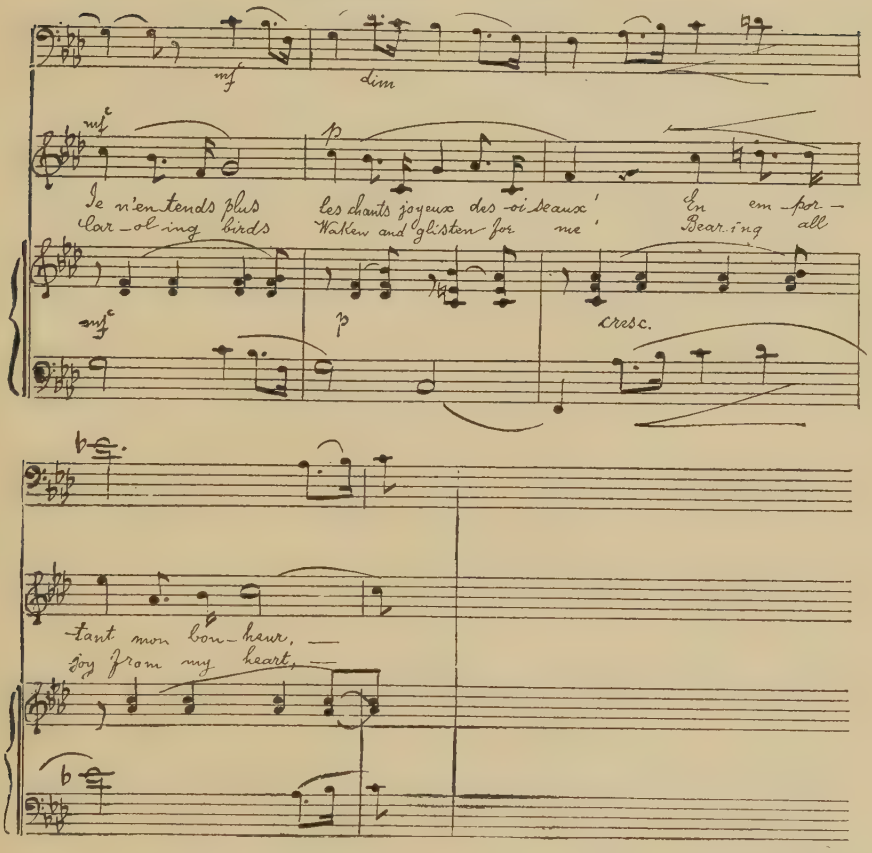
Autumn songs are rarer and more complex, for they deal with the darker side of life. The following passage from Massenet's Élégie, with 'cello obligato, shows what an atmosphere of sadness may be evoked by an inversion of the Spring Song motive—by a general downward trend, a minor key, and a slower tempo.

Downward Gravitation. (Death.)

Example 55.



Example 55—Continued.



(1) **Onomatopoetic Accelerando.** There are other cases where the well-defined accelerando emphasizes onomatopoetically some aspect of physical nature. Turn back to page 43 and look at the reiterated notes in the measures from the familiar "Brook." In this case the accelerando is far greater than the accompanying crescendo. Psychically it would seem that the accelerando enters in more noticeably where the feeling is one apt to induce or which implies motion: in the expression of the more agitated sentiments. In cases of despair and grief intensity

may be sufficiently manifested through increased volume and emphasis, the accelerando being almost unnoticeable; but in anger, fear, violent wooing, etc., there must be more defined variation in rhythm.

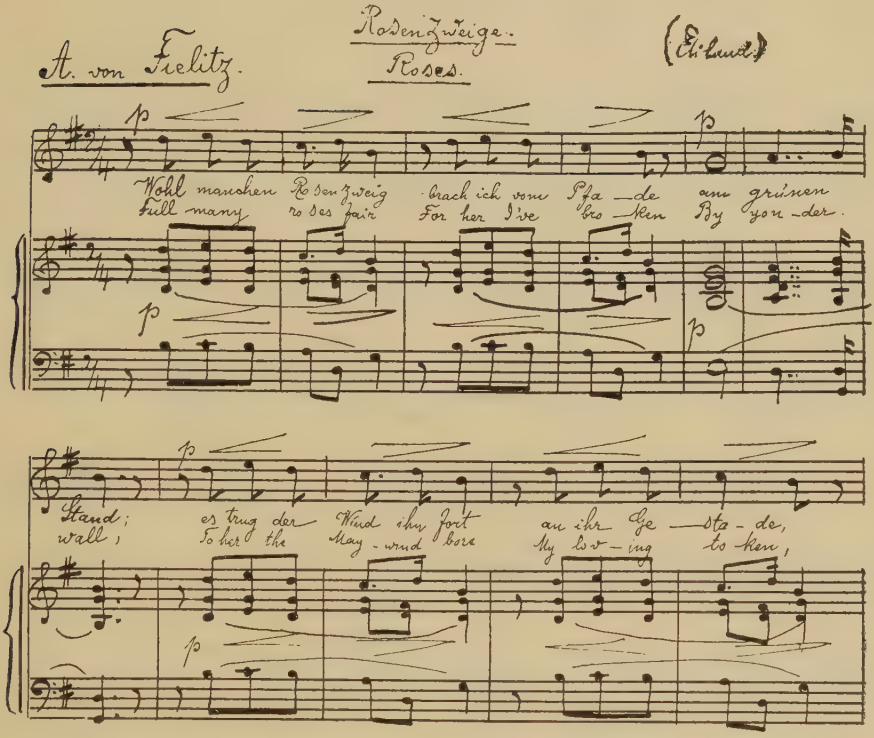
It has been stated that these variations are to be more or less marked according to the structure of the composition, but the intelligent composer instinctively builds in accordance with the above rules: the higher flights and more abrupt changes for the more violent and ungoverned feelings. Of course these remarks do not apply to passages where the voice is used only as an instrument. In such cases the mechanical rule may be blindly followed.

Inseparably connected with this part of the study of a song is the question of time. The student has been warned against making unnecessary and eccentric departures from the rhythm, but time is a relative term. When we say "keep time" we do not mean a metronome exactness—heaven forbid! Correct rhythm demands that the beats in a measure be in proper relation to one another, but the same measure, occurring in different positions may be given without rhythmical irregularity, yet at a faster or slower pace. This is not to make an accelerando.

Time Manipulation.

An accelerando is a steady increase of speed note by note up to a climax, followed by a slackening—obviously a manipulation of the rhythm itself. The following fragment from "Eliland" illustrates perfectly what is meant. The repetition of the phrase, beginning at bar 8, is given in the same rhythm as the first four bars, but with more motion, as implied in the text.

Example 56.



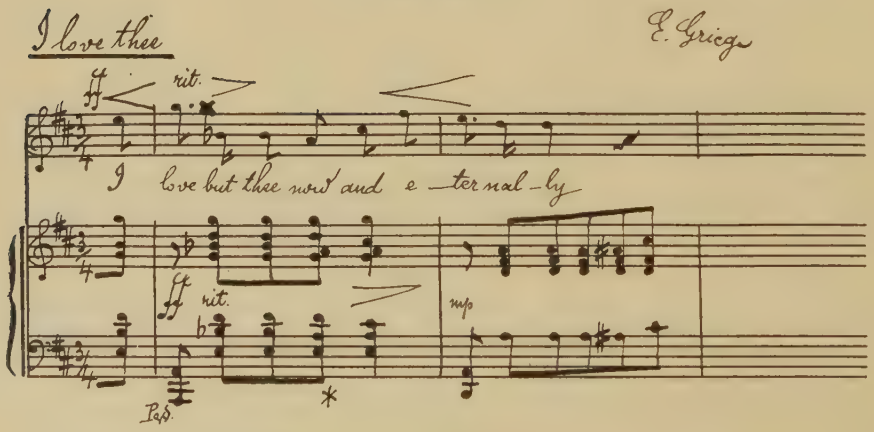
The singer must start with a rational intention, mark his metrical and phrase accents, and while he sings in strict rhythm, each section, each phrase even, may differ in speed; for each phrase in text and music must express some change, a development at least, in the sentiment. If put to proof by the metronome this will be found to apply to all music set to words, even to those songs whose character would seem to depend upon an unvarying beat. It is possible that before reaching this point, according to the method advised, the singer will have settled in his mind what the foundation speed or tempo of the song should be; but the finishing touches are usually needed to put a cachet upon the first impression, perhaps to modify it by those dramatic accents, dissonances,

or peculiar intervals needing some subtle change in tone color or a portamento to give the final throb. The portamento is one of the most stupendous effects at the singer's command; but it loses much of its force when used, as is too often the case, indiscriminately, without stopping to consider what it means and what it is for. The term signifies to carry the voice from note to note. It is the opposite of the clear, clean exactness, the percussionary steps that are the general rule for good singing—*unless* there is reason for reversing it. This clear exactness implies a normal condition of control; the portamento shows any lapse from this mental composure, such as excessive love and tenderness, sorrow, agony.

Portamento.

(5) **Portamento of Love.** In the Grieg measures the portamento is made in dropping from the high G to B flat on the words "I love but thee."

Example 57.

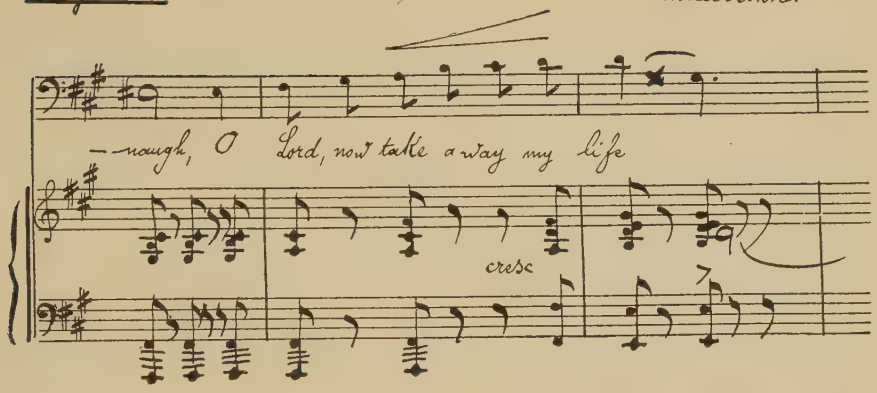


(6) **Portamento of Despair.** In the two passages from "Elijah" (both from the great aria "It is enough") despair is shown in each case by a portamento between the last two notes.

Example 58.

Elijah

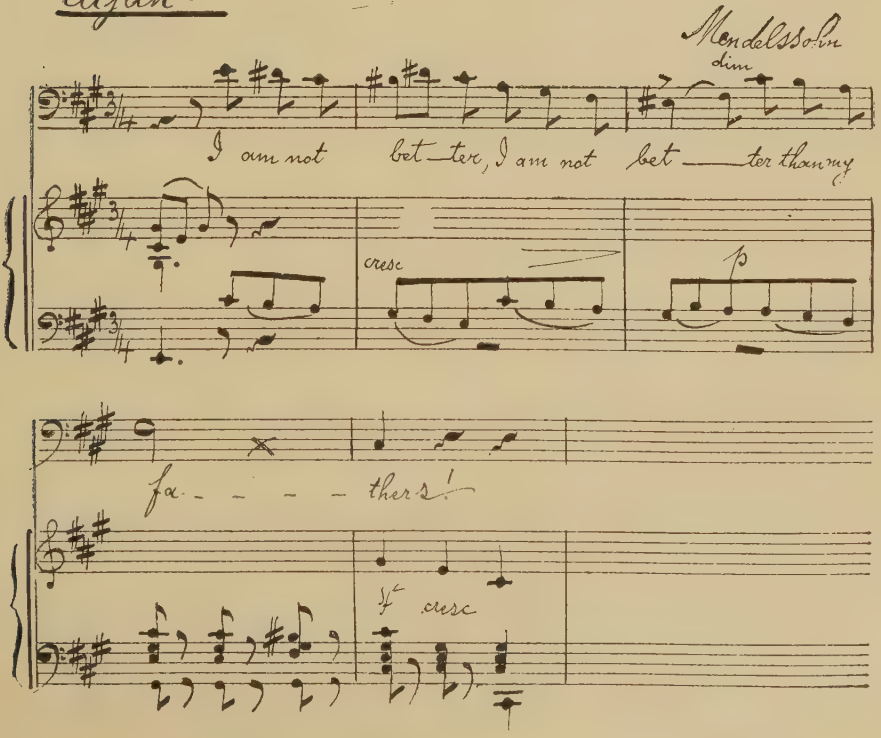
Mendelssohn.



Example 59.

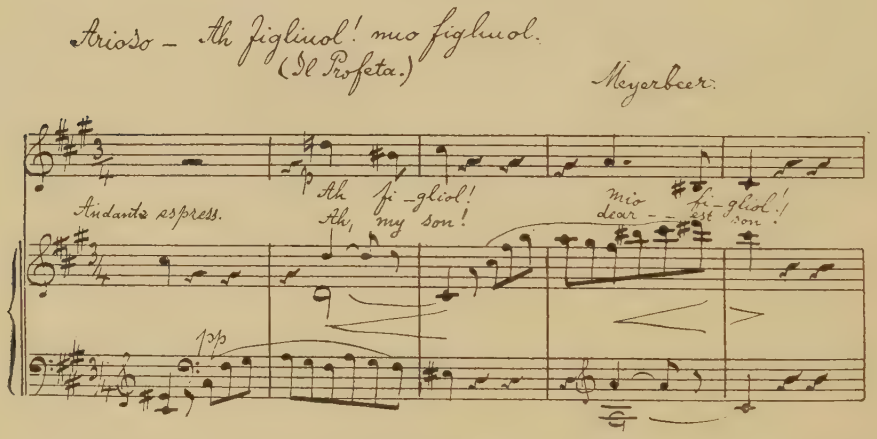
Elijah.

Mendelssohn



(6) The example from the opera "Prophete" expresses the despair of the widowed mother of the pretender, John of Leyden, when she is repudiated by her son.

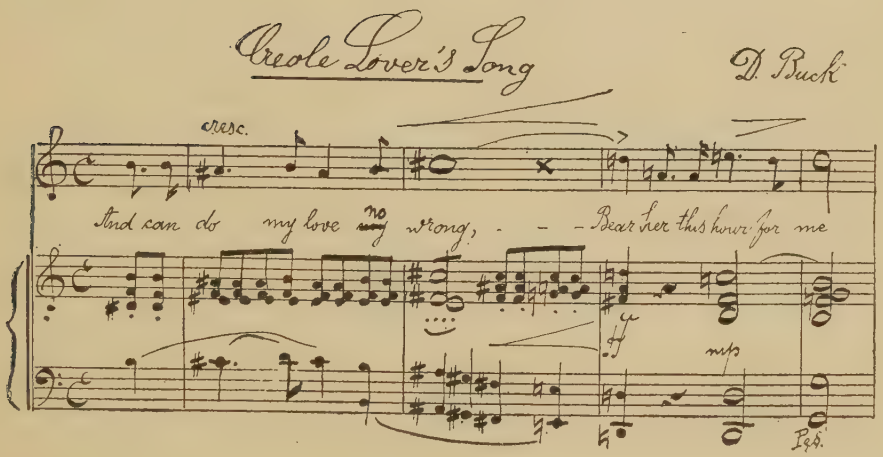
Example 60.



Composers nearly always express these conditions of sentimental collapse by a significant drop in the melody. (See bar 1 in "Ich liebe dich," and last bars of other two examples.) Under such conditions there is a physical reason for the use of a portamento. It is to soften the shock that would result from such a drop: another example of the effort in singing, as in life, to circumvent the law of gravitation. The upward portamento is obviously rare. It is sometimes used in preparation for a climax: in carrying over an anticipatory chord to its resolution. For this the psychic reason is clear: anticipation is a strain, a striving, excitement in some measure; and so to carry the chord of the seventh (or any other of similar purpose), to the tonic or key note by means of a portamento is to symbolize the relief, the relaxation of achievement. (See page 48, Example 39, from "Roberto.") The E natural just preceding the double bar must be connected with F in new key by a portamento.

(7) **Upward Portamento.**

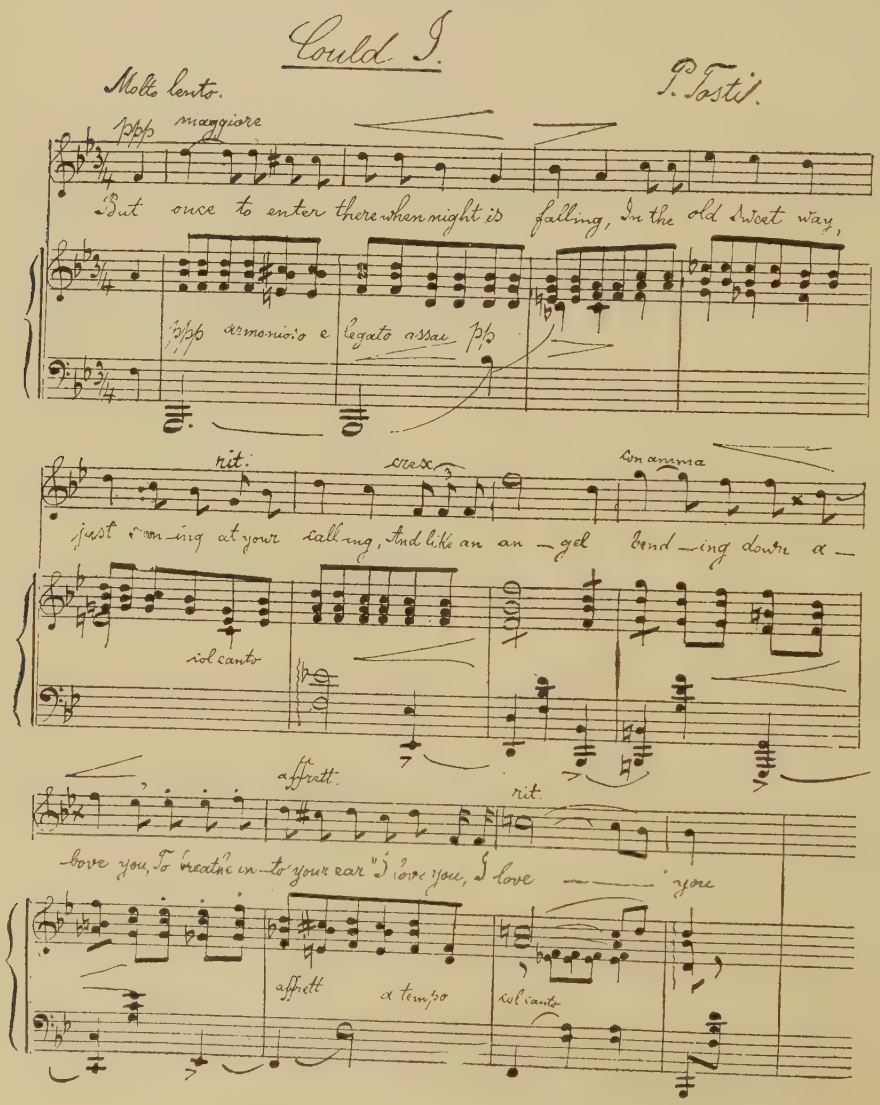
Example 61.



8 **Double Portamento.**

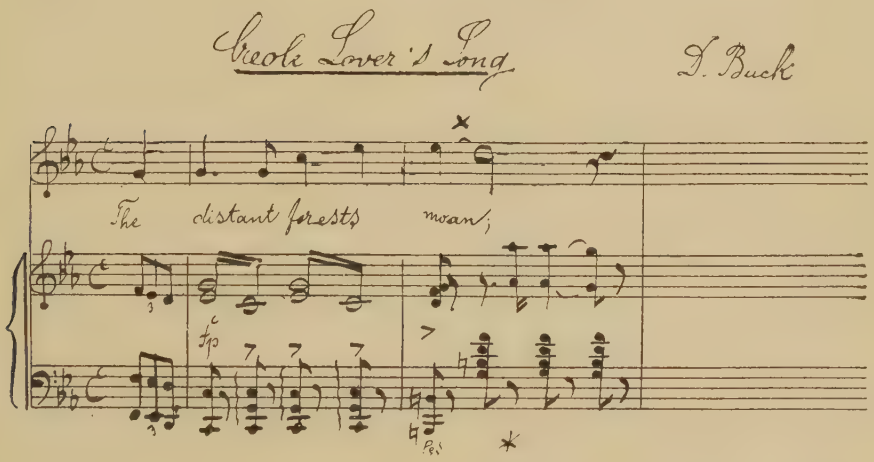
In Tosti's song, "Could I?" a double portamento is admissible on the words: "and like an angel bending down above you." It suggests the motion of wings. This is however an exceptional case.

Example 62.


Could I.
Molto lento.
P. Tosti.
ppp maggiore
But once to enter there when night is falling, In the old sweet way,
ppp armonioso e legato assai p
rit.
cresc
con anima
just com-ing at your call-ing, And like an an-gel bend-ing down a-
vol canto
affrett.
rit.
-bove you, To breathe in-to your ear "I love you, I love you
affrett
a tempo
vol canto

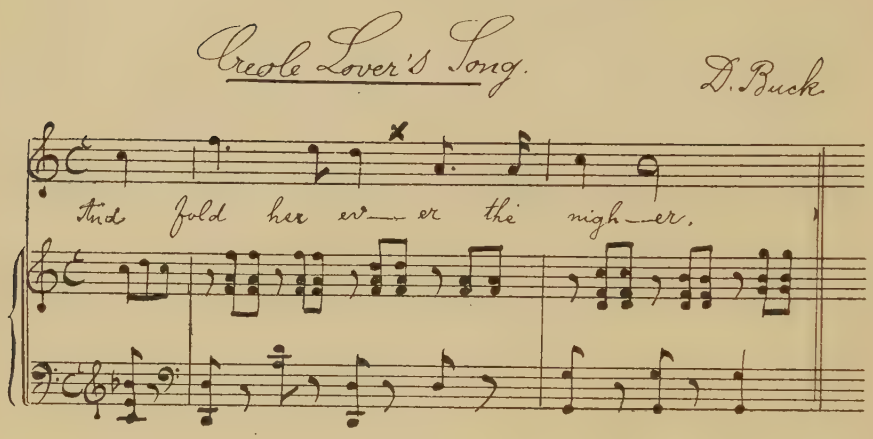
(8) **Descriptive Portamento.** Frequently the single portamento is used descriptively, where the carrying of the voice suggests a mechanical action indicative of mental lapses from the perpendicular, such as leaning or bending down, fainting, death, sleep; also occasionally it is regarded as an intensification of the legato (as legatissimo) and therefore as descriptive of smooth things in Nature, such as water. This idea must, however, be pursued with the utmost caution, and only in cases where to emphasize some detail of the scenery, so to speak, serves to throw the sentiment into stronger relief.

Example 63.

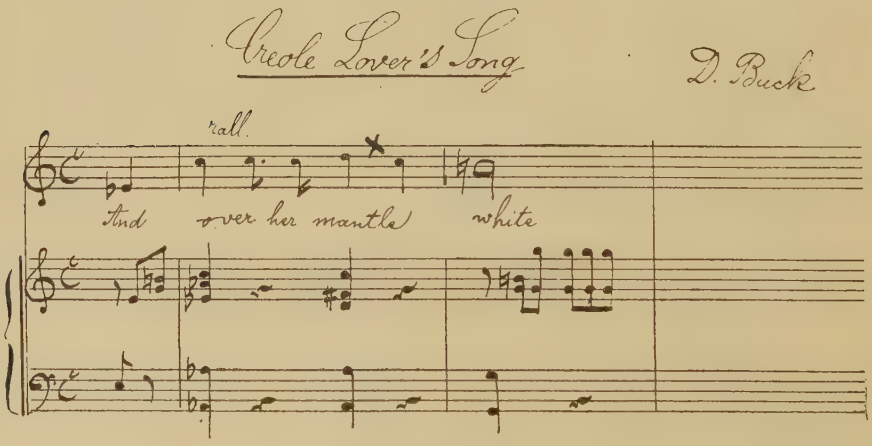


The above example requires no explanation. The two following, from the same song, are equally suggestive. The portamento occurs between D and A on the word "ever," rather than earlier in the bar, because the interval is longer. In the last fragment the portamento deals with the motion of the waving bamboo trees that throw shadows "over her mantle white."

Example 64.



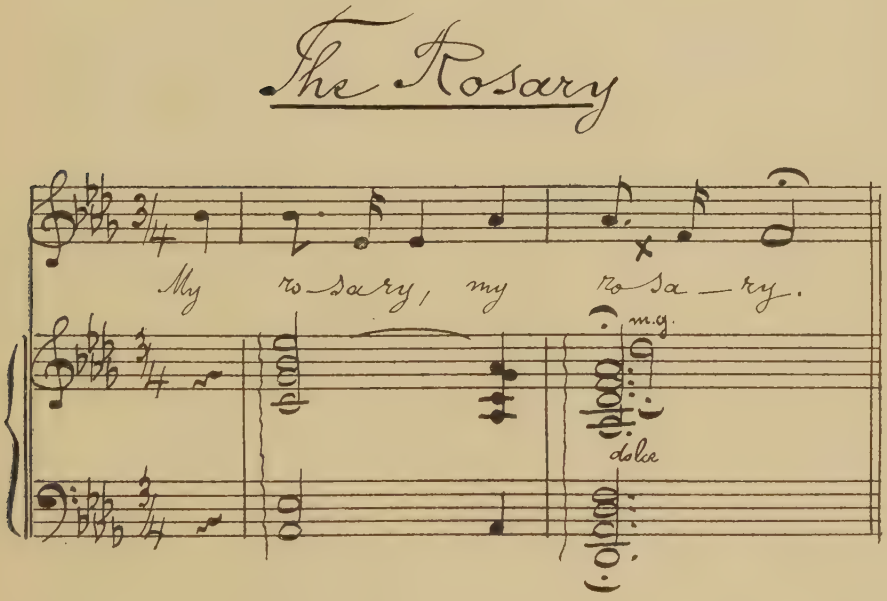
Example 65.



The student must avoid, above all things, an abuse of this effect; nothing gives such a vulgar, sloppy style. He must remember that every rule is relative, and that a knowledge of perspective is necessary to the painting of a picture—in whatever medium. Thus, when a passage is repeated in which a portamento would seem to be admissible, that

effect must be used but once, at the end, as the extreme emphasis. This rule is borne out by both the musical and the dramatic instincts.

Example 66.



We repeat, that every composition has a predominant mood; but no mood, no single emotion even, can be expressed by the employment of one musical effect. The most definite feeling is complex, resulting from a variety of impulses having hidden springs in the depths of our nature. Now the portamento represents but one aspect of any emotion —an aspect moving in its proper position and relation to others, but whose constant presence becomes sickening. Thus, if a singer continues beyond a certain point to *hopelessly* despair, his audience yearns to suggest change of scene and to bid him begone; if a love song be filled with

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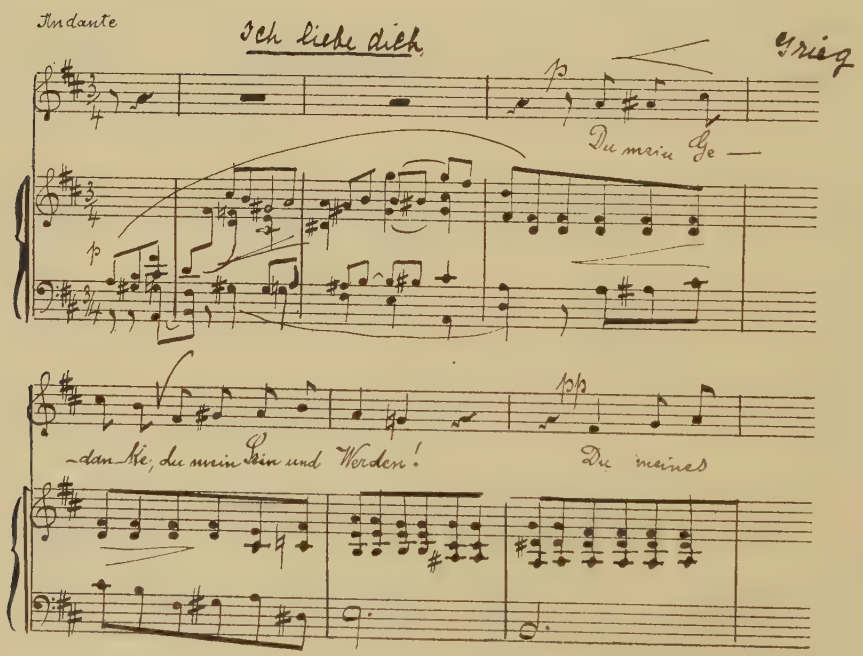
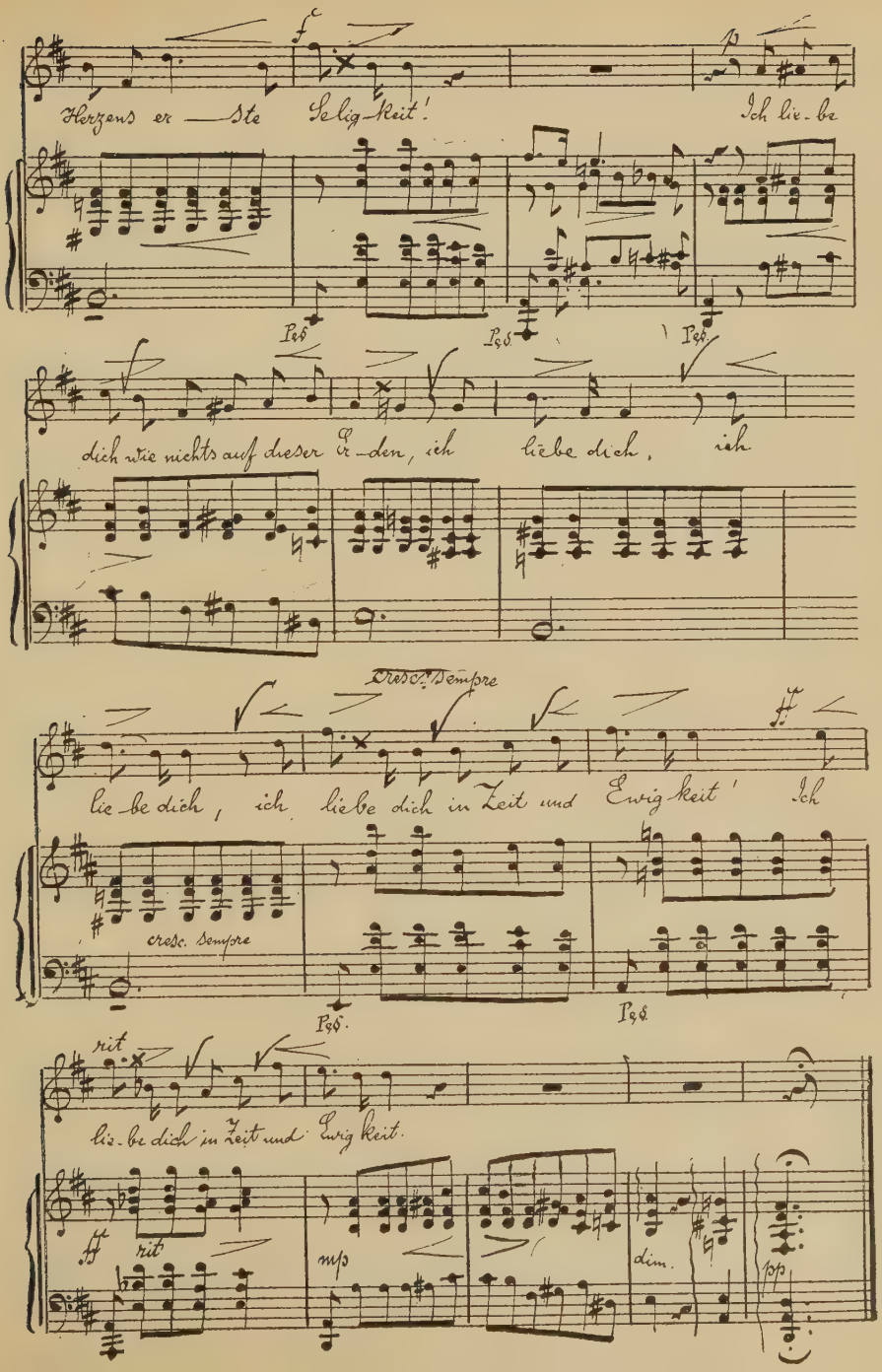
the languishing portamento the effect is nauseating. In the song, "Ich liebe dich," which we quote because its import is so obvious, and because it is so short, the portamento is used only four times: in bar 9, on the word "seligkeit," in bars 13, 16, and 18. The impetuous ardor, all the more robust qualities of love, are perfectly portrayed by the lavish use of crescendo and accelerando.

Example 67.



Example 67– Continued.



Another means which has been used by singers for a similar purpose, and against which students cannot be too emphatically warned, is the tremolo. The tremolo, whether involuntary or intentional, is produced by imperfect co-ordination between the brain and the breath striking the vocal chords. The breath, by forcing or by weakness can make vibration either too rapid or too slow, and the tone consequently sharp or flat; it is the brain, however, which through the auditory nerve determines the pitch, and its struggle to hold it against either of these faults of breath control results in the tremolo. Of course there are strenuous situations, notably in opera, where a momentary tremolo might give a realistic touch; but any lapse from vocal control is dangerous, and the use of this effect particularly so because it leads to habitual singing off pitch. It has been the ruin of many a good voice.

The Tremolo.

The tempo in which any song is given does much to stamp upon it the predominant mood of which we have spoken. Its relative correctness depends, among other considerations, upon the quality of voice: that is to say that the same marking would indicate a different tempo for bass than for tenor, because in the deeper voice vibration is slower. As to the exact or metronomic tempo of any given composition it is impossible to dogmatize. Examples of hesitancy, on the part of Beethoven and other great composers, in the marking of their own compositions, are well known: cases where, the original copy having been mislaid, a master has remarked an entire symphony in radically different tempo from his primary impulse, as the recovery of the manuscript proved. It may, however, be said that a relatively slower tempo is required in the older classics than in modern compositions dealing with the same sentiment. Life, and everything pertaining to it, was slower in those days; moreover, plastic beauty was then considered *summum bonum,* and the tempo was suited to the display of this beauty. In the tempo of the present day composers strive first of all after dramatic effect, often to the obscuration and, in our opinion, to the unnecessary detriment of beauty of form. It is even asserted by some authorities that emotional expression must ever be at the expense of organic perfection; yet all songs that have thus far stood the test of

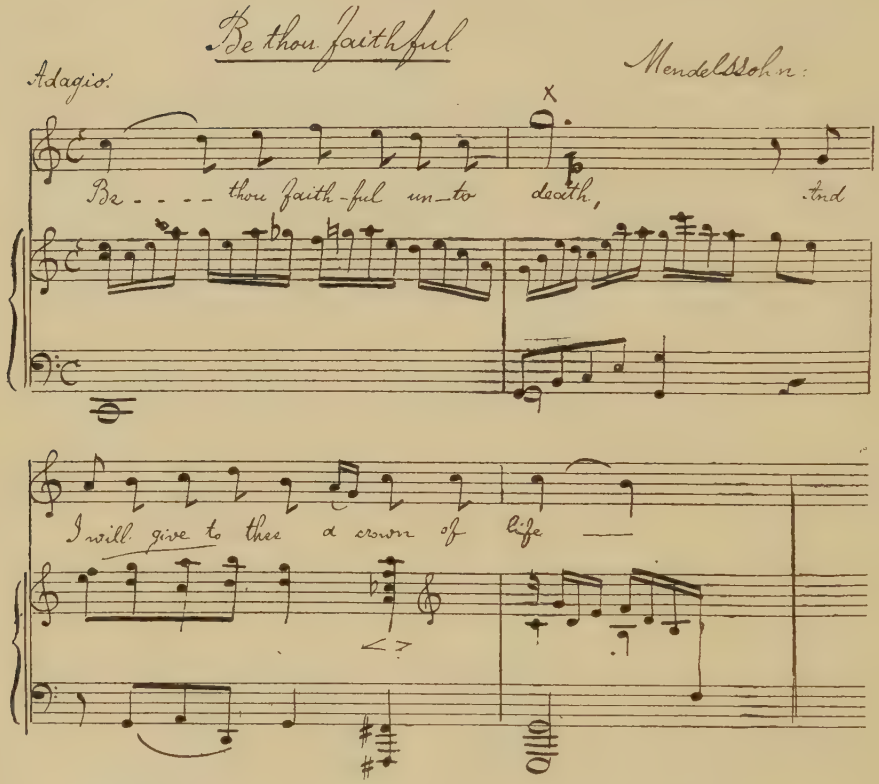
Tempo.

time exhibit this formal or plastic beauty and, when sung by artists, cannot be said to fall short of expressiveness. An invention of new forms, commensurate with our progress in tone color, is to be hopefully expected, but not distortions, or the flabby combination of inorganic elements that some of the younger school call songs.

For the proper classical tempo we must look to tradition—and then be guided by our general culture and common sense. Tradition is supposed to be an accretion of rules proved valid by the best minds of past ages, and which have demonstrated their fitness to survive. Tradition of this sort does exist, but it must be carefully distinguished from mere vulgar hearsay. Some of the most time-honored traditional renderings, hunted to their lairs, are found to have their source in the personal idiosyncrasy of a great artist. Musicians must investigate the foundation of a tradition and beware of blindly imitating any peculiarity they hear. The greatest singers are but human, and sometimes save their vanity at the expense of art. Their interpretation, not only in tempo but in other equally important details, is too often occasioned by and dependent upon their vocal limitations, dynamic or register, or what not. For instance: a noted English tenor made a sensation in New York a few seasons ago in his performance of the great aria "Be thou faithful unto death," by singing the word "death" very softly. The tone quality was exquisite, and the effect in itself pretty; but singing a command like that in robust voice up to the crucial word and then giving out, implied rather comically that the man showed cowardice at the end and was destined to damnation, for the crown of life was promised on condition of endurance beyond that point. In spite of the manifest absurdity of such a rendering, young singers began to imitate it at once without probing the artist's reason, which, as he quite frankly owned in a conversation with the author, was the lack in his voice of a climatic G. He could only carry his chest register to F, so in using the head tone on G he purposely exaggerated the effect, taking the word *mezza voce,* in order that it might appear intentional rather than a disability.

Tradition.

Example 68.



Many similar tricks for the concealment of vocal defects have come down to us as tradition, having been accepted unthinkingly because they were the usage of some singer great, not because of, but in spite of them. Sometimes the artist who " created " the composition was unable to carry out fully the composer's intention, and the wrong tradition has thus started at headquarters. (All students are familiar with the struggles of Mozart and other masters with the singers of their operas.) Then when time raises up a thoughtful and more competent singer, what seems at first an unwarranted innovation on his part turns out to be really a nearer approximation to the original idea. The public had an example

of this kind when Gwyllym Miles last sang "Elijah" in New York. His rapid pace in some of the numbers was deprecated by many critics; yet it was discovered (by an appeal to certain sources of correct tradition in England) that his tempi were those insisted upon by Mendelssohn himself when he conducted the oratorio.

These remarks are in no sense a depreciation of individuality. The musician should use every studious means at his command to inform himself concerning tradition, but on this point of tempo there will remain more latitude than on almost any other, particularly in the rendering of modern songs. Indeed it is often in the choice of tempo especially that we detect the personal feeling of the artist. The author has heard that same little song, "Ich liebe dich," given by many singers, men and women. It is of course not a subtle song. Its sentiment is absolutely governed by the rules of the dramatic reading of the text: the delivery that the words, as words, demand; and in none of these qualities of emphasis, sonority, or general diction did these interpreters differ, *but* each sang it faster or more slowly, according to his or her more impulsive or more measured nature. Mme. Ternina's rendering was very striking. She gave it much more slowly and broadly than is usual, and by this means alone went far toward convincing her hearers that the love was not mere passion, but a devotion that might really last the promised length of time. This depth and sincerity characterize the German temperament and, indeed, German music in general, giving a poetic atmosphere to many direct, homely little songs that, sung in any other spirit, would seem banal. German songs tell a story by preference, while the French more often set to music an episode—some moment of subtle charm, of whose evanescent quality we are, however, too often conscious. This is not to say that French songs never tell a story, or that either French or Italian songs (in which everything is subordinated to grace and sweetness), lack warm, even ecstatic feeling; but this differentiation seems to be national. Each attains the dramatic end in its own way, and appeals to those in the audience of allied temperament.

Latitude in Choice of Tempo.

The National Atmosphere of Songs.

We hope that the student (and perchance even the critic) has con-

vinced himself that it is not our aim to deride temperament in music. A large number of musicians, clutching frantically at this supreme quality, have ever cried to the higher criticism like theologians under similar circumstances: "Thou makest the grace of God of none effect!" But it is those who refuse to recognize natural law who make that grace of none effect, since God has a habit of working through law. Matthew Arnold has termed religion "morality touched with emotion," and we may in the same broad sense define art as "beauty touched with emotion." Emotion is the vitality of each, yet emotion alone is neither religion nor art; and they who have sought to exalt this quality, regardless of perspective and proportion, have achieved erratic results. We insist that our theory, far from eliminating or belittling the temperamental quality in music, gives freer play to the expression of individuality, in that it stimulates thought as well as feeling on the part of the singer, ceaselessly reiterating the immortal dictum: "Know thyself."

What Temperament is not.

The difficulty seems to be an outgrowth of the general haziness as to what temperament really is. As the object of music is to portray human emotion, so temperament is assumed to be mere feeling; but it is much more than that. If it were feeling, pure and simple, then interpretation would vary only in degree, not in quality; yet the difference in the individual temperament of singers sometimes renders their interpretation of the same song radically different while well within the bounds of law. Of course some songs admit of greater variation than others, whereas in opera there is even greater latitude, so that among operatic artists these individual differences are very clearly defined. Everyone is acquainted with—let us say the Marguerite of Mme. Eames and of Mme. Calvé. In each case the character lives—a noble creation, but each of these gifted women separately endows it with special traits that predominate in herself. This is the key to the whole matter. Temperament is born: the result of racial development, heredity, and many complex laws. It may and *must* be educated, but cannot be changed; it remains to tinge and color the artist's work. It is in short the expression in art of personality. A vivid personality is what sways us and what we call genius in every

What Really Constitutes Temperament.

walk of life—in politics and in the pulpit, in business, no less than in the arts. A personality of commanding strength is bound by inexorable laws of being to self-expression, and its medium is chosen in accordance with the talent and intellectual qualities. The general mental make-up stamps the temperament as political, religious, philosophical, artistic (in the ordinary sense), or musical, and decides whether its possessor shall be a Talleyrand, Savonarola, Spencer, Goethe, Raphael, or Beethoven. These are examples of transcendent genius; but the difference between genius and talent is one of degree, not of kind. Thus temperament is seen to be a dual, though very positive quality: *a co-ordination of the intellectual and emotional.*

Training of Temperament.

It is because temperament is intellectual no less than emotional that it can be trained to bear full testimony to the meaning of the composer whose work it is to interpret. With that quick intuition which is one of its most salient properties, it understands and is taught to express much that is at variance with the nature of the artist. The laws which have been under discussion are its tools. Even if only the singer's personal feeling were in question he must be instructed, for singing is not a natural means of expression. He who sings in a certain way because he *feels like it* will enjoy the performance more than his audience will; for that he will express what he feels is most improbable—and what about the composer's meaning? To properly depict that technical control is the first necessity; the ability to make a crescendo, diminuendo, climax, etc., at will; secondly, the knowledge, well thought out, of what effect is desired, and why. The singer must have used every studious means to become impregnated with the composer's thought. It is impossible to sing an emotion which is not adequately conceived, both as to quality and its proportion to the effect as a whole. Sometimes this conception is wholly intuitional and intellectual, for the required sentiment may be quite foreign to the interpreter—above or below his moral stature; but scientific observation has already decided what inflections, emphasis, and quality of voice go to the natural manifestation of each human feeling; therefore if all these elements be displayed the impression is the same as if the emotion were felt—nay, even more forcible, for calculation can add stress to some

particular phase of feeling suited to the situation. The singer is dealing not with nature, but with art—an imitation of nature.

It is surprising that any question as to the necessity of real feeling *at the time of performance* should have ever arisen. That it has done so is sufficient proof of the unscientific standpoint of most singers. We know that prolonged emotional tension is extremely enervating to the entire system. What would become of the health of an actor who suffered daily the woes of all his impersonations—or, for that matter, of his moral character? And what would become, under similar circumstances, of the singer's voice? One of the effects of emotional impulses upon the muscular system is to throw it into a state of contraction or rigidity. Thus emotion tightens the muscles of the throat, and to sing while under the control of feeling must always be at the expense and to the detriment of the normal or natural method of voice production. Too many with the best intentions make the mistake of interpreting through the momentary feeling, whereas in the scientific sequence emotion is but the foundation, and must be interpreted through the brain, and thus conducted unhampered through the physical medium.

Deleterious Effect of Actual Emotion upon Normal Voice Production.

This is not a contradiction of what has been written concerning the inestimable endowment of temperament, or even in depreciation of mere feeling. Temperament gives the most sympathetic insight into the composer's meaning. The more deeply this is felt the better, and the nearer that meaning to the personal nature of the singer the more spontaneous will be his interpretation; *but* this sympathetic assimilation should take place during the period of study —not at the moment of performance. It is a help in determining artistic aims, and means; but, study once finished, the musician should sing upon the ashes of past feeling, with every faculty under control. Such performance will usually, it is true, cause in the singer a certain reflex emotion—enough to add the last touch of sincerity, but not enough to contract the muscles and so render the tone throaty. Also it is admissible, nay inevitable, that his rendering should vary in minor details at the last moment. Slight instinctive modifications are attendant upon unexpected acoustic conditions, upon the sympathy of

Proper Time for Feeling.

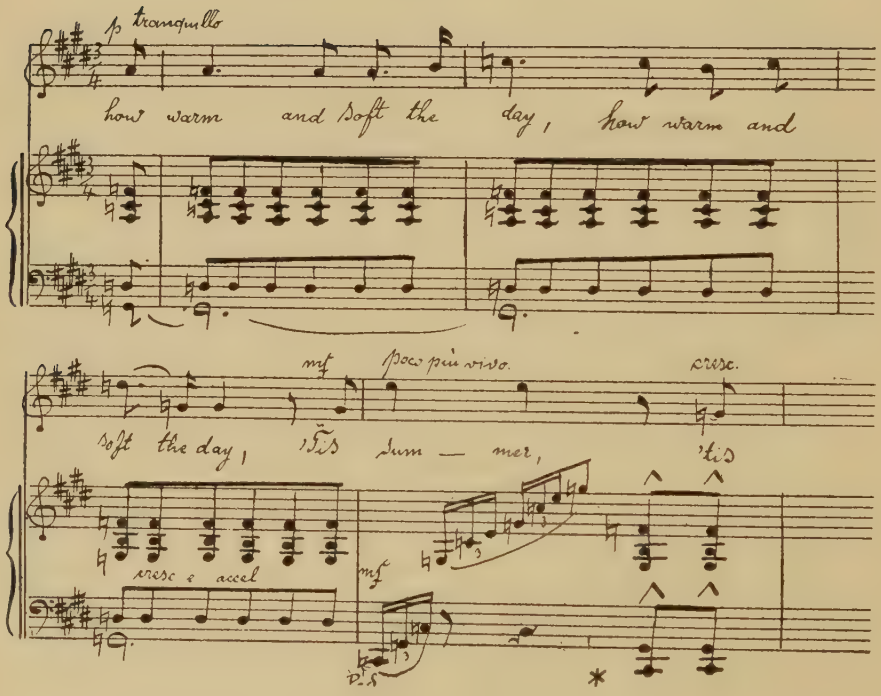
the audience, and upon other influences, physical and mental; for the singer is a sensitive, highly-strung human instrument—not a machine. We have not aimed to fit every bar of music that has been or shall be written with an inexorable rule of interpretation. It will be seen that the laws enunciated only restrain impulse within the bounds of reason and, like all educational restraint, by so doing give the key to higher powers.

The conscientious singer has latitude enough—of the right kind. He has no right to make changes or interpolations for the purpose of showing off his voice: to introduce high notes or in any way sacrifice the intention of the composer to personal vanity; but he may make that intention clearer by any reasonable means, even altering with due caution in order to enhance the artistic effect. Some examples of justifiable alterations (for purifying the phrasing) have been cited. (See pages 35 and 36.) There are other alterations that may be allowed. For instance: In the song "Snow-flakes," by Cowen, there is at the end the words, "'Tis summer," repeated three times upon the same notes. Now repetition is almost always employed for the sake of emphasis, moreover it is here the climax of the song; the author has therefore made a practice of taking a high G in place of the last E. It is a note belonging in the chord, and may be followed by a drop to low E. This variation has had the hearty indorsement of the composer.

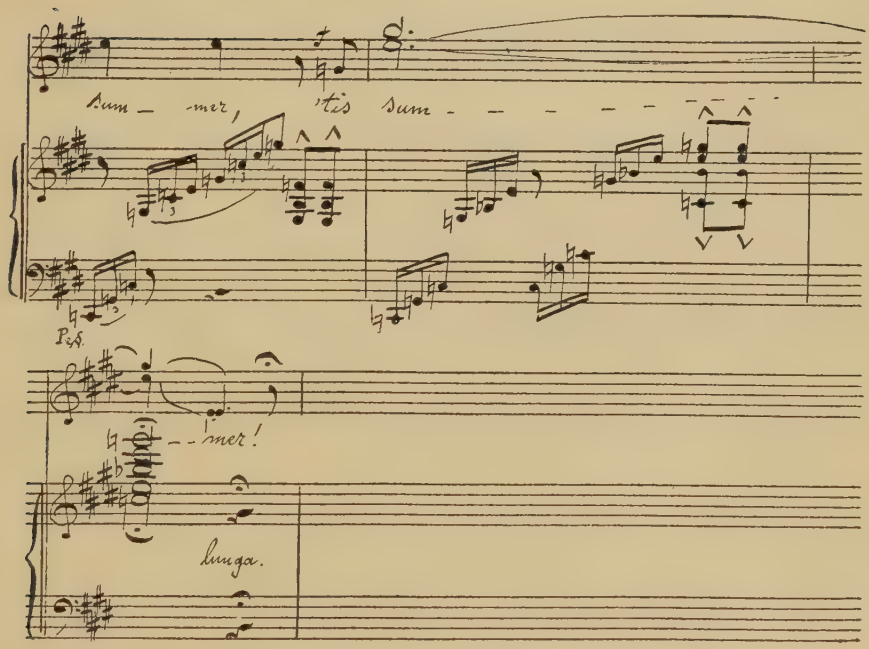
Permissible Alterations.

Example 69.

Snow-Flakes.



Example 69—Continued.



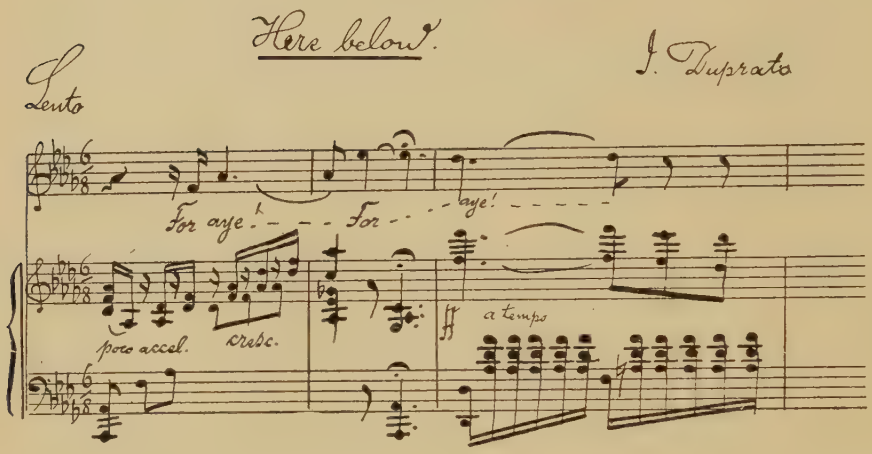
In the song "Here below," by Duprato, a similar change is advisable for the same reason. Each verse ends with the words "For aye" always upon the same notes. The poem shows, however, a spiritual progression; each verse ends (poetically) upon a higher level.

HERE BELOW.

I.

Here below all flowers must perish,
All the songs of birds pass away,
'Tis summer! 'Tis summer!
I dream of a summer to cherish.
For aye! For aye!

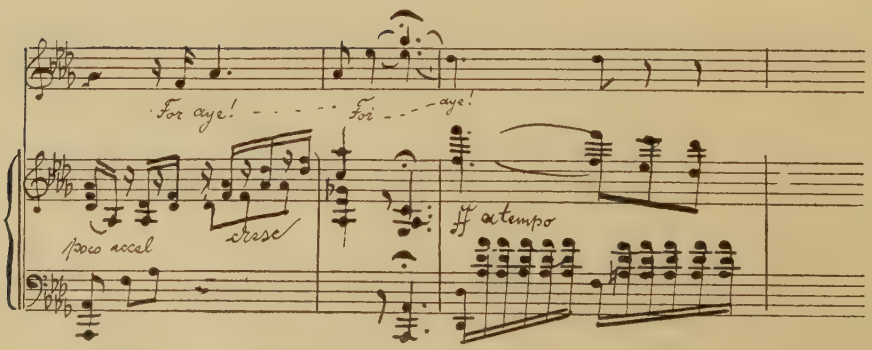
Example 70—A.



II.

Here below we tire of caresses,
Tho' the smile on the lips still play
I dream of affection that blesses
For aye! For aye!

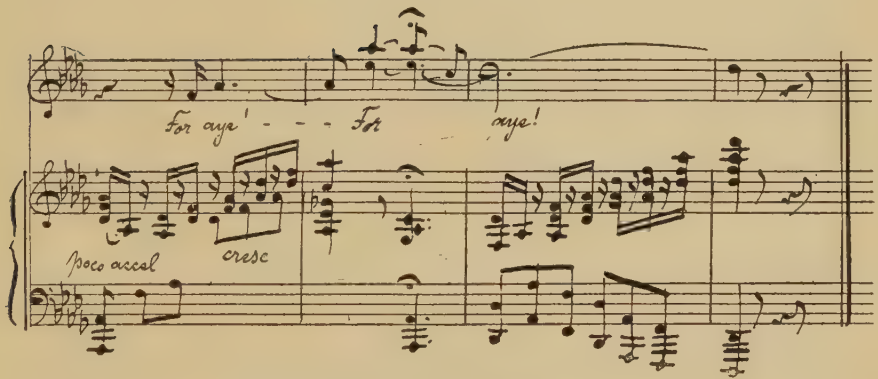
Example 70—B.



III.

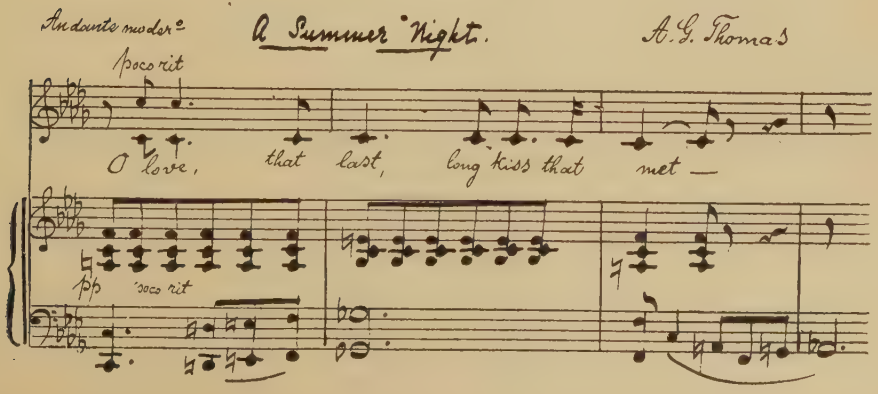
"Here below men ever are sighing
That their love has outlived its day
I dream of a marriage undying—
For aye! For aye!"

Example 70—C



One more example will sufficiently elucidate our meaning, and show the bounds within which such liberties may be taken. It is unreasonable that in the following phrase the exclamation "Oh, love!" should be sung upon the same level as the words that succeed it. To take it an octave higher makes no harmonic change, and enhances the dramatic effect.

Example 71.



11

History of the "Upper Note" Introduced in Ancient Music.

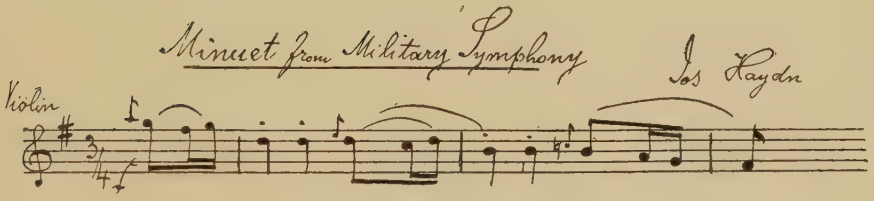
There is another species of alteration which began as a liberty, but which has long since become a rule: the introduction of the appoggiatura, or "upper note," in certain passages of oratorio and opera of the so-called classic period. The entire life, motion, and dramatic force of music is seen to-day to depend upon the dissonances and not on the consonances. The study of harmony in the early days of music began, however, as a matter of course, with an exploration of the field of concords. Thus the old system did not adapt itself to the needs of dramatic expression, and while delightful in moderate doses, lacked force and continuity of interest. Harmony, in the days of Haydn and Mozart, was in its early youth, and notation so restricted that the older composers had to resort to many devices to conform at the same time to recognized rules and to their instinct, which was far ahead of the technical means of expression in their day. Genius has an instinctive choice and grasp of means adapted to the desired end. Its liberties, having proved their validity throughout a period of probation, are incorporated in true tradition and become the harmonic rules of the following generation; but it takes time even for genius to reach out beyond its own period. The greatest musicians appreciated the force of dissonances long before they had studied out their true nature on a scientific basis.

Dramatic Instinct in Advance of Harmonic Restrictions.

The Appoggiatura.

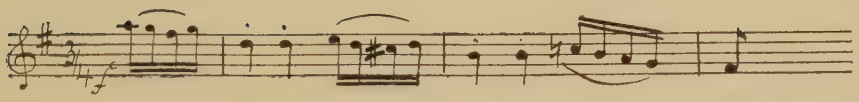
They began by writing the dissonance as a note of embellishment. When placed before a note on an accented beat it was executed as a long appoggiatura: that is, it divided the honors equally with the concordant note. The following passage was written by Haydn as follows:

Example 72—A.



but was played as it would be written to-day, thus:

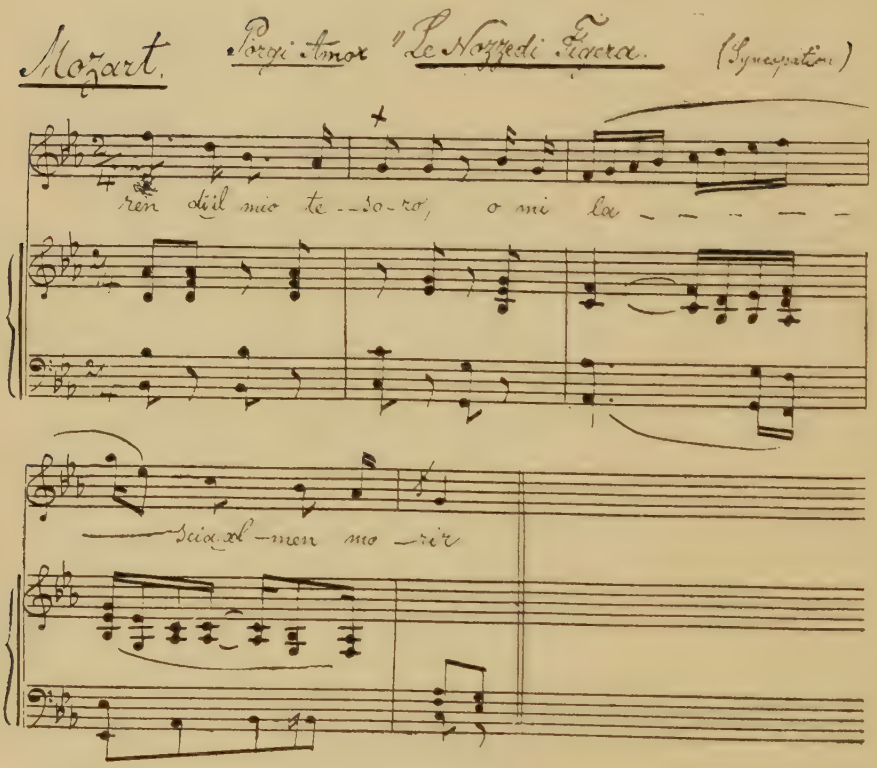
Example 72—B.



When the dissonance was placed before a note on an unaccented beat it was executed like the "grace notes" of to-day.

This manner of introducing dissonances soon became a recognized custom, so that in the vocal music of Glück, Haydn, and Mozart, as well as of the older Italian school, the upper note was not written in at all, but was usually left to the discretion of the singer, the rule being *to insert it only when the accented note came upon the accented syllable in the text.*

Example 73.

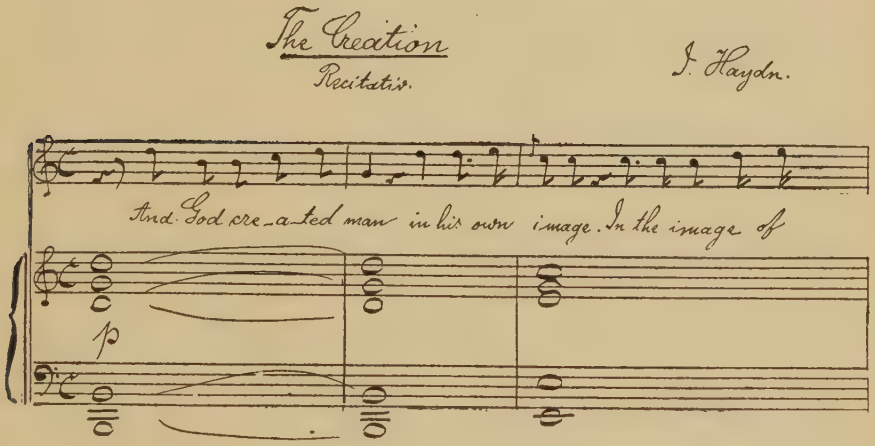


The first G in the second measure was and is always sung as A, being regarded as a suspension which, according to the old school, was a tone held over from a weak (unaccented) beat in which it was concordant to a strong beat in which it was dissonant; *to be immediately resolved downward.* In the last measure the note is written in the manner of grace notes, but is not executed as such. In Mozart's day notation was rather loose in this particular, for the reason that, as has been explained, the execution of all such small notes depended upon the taste of the singer. At the present day, when suspensions from below resolving

upward are equally correct, the student can only hope to correctly introduce these unwritten upper notes of the classic period by consulting an experienced teacher and using the most carefully prepared editions of all classic works. The only guide to independent study is the rule given: that only the *upper* note can be added in this manner, *on an accented beat, and upon a rhetorically important word or syllable in the text.*

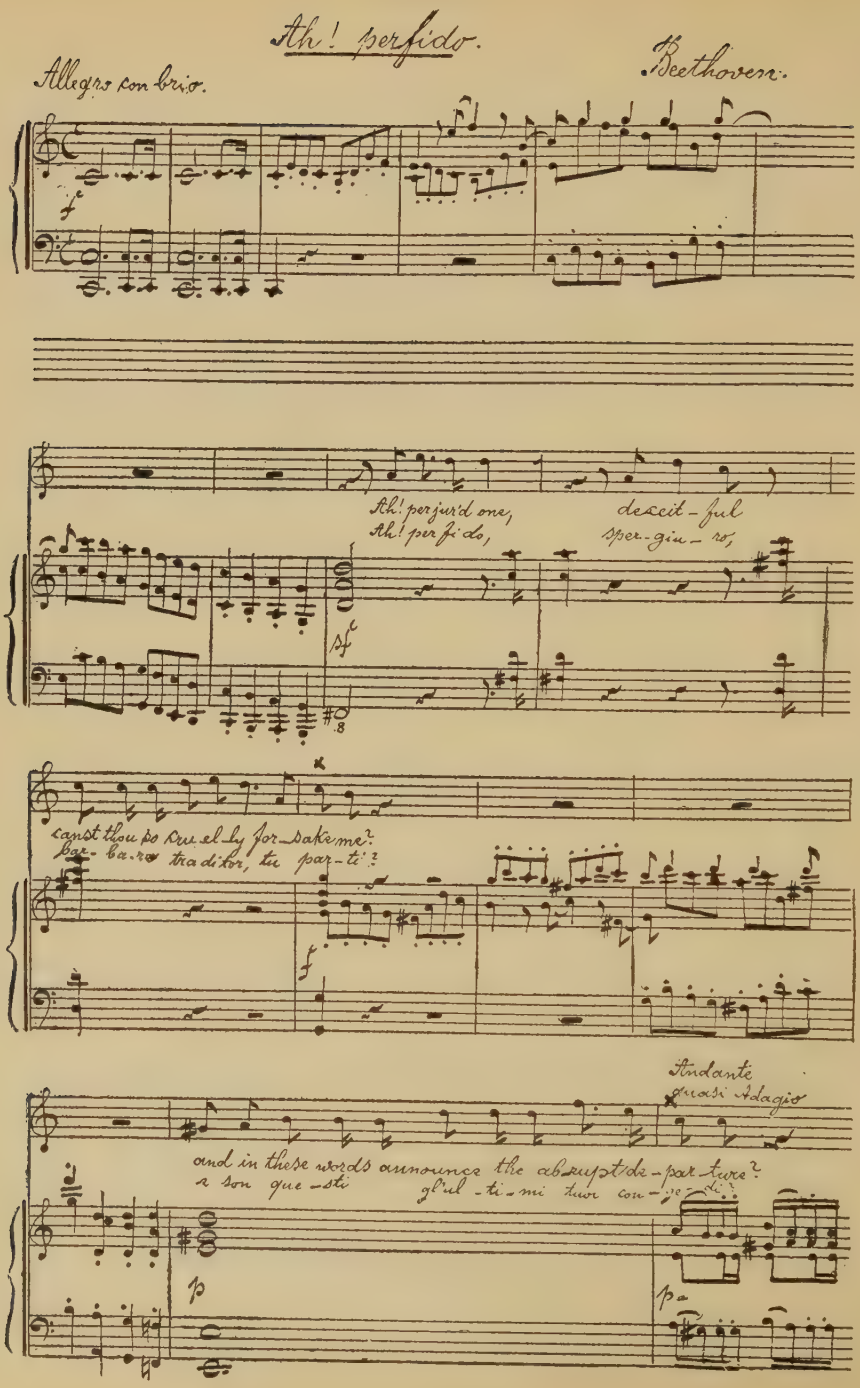
Rule for Introduction of Upper Note.

Example 74.

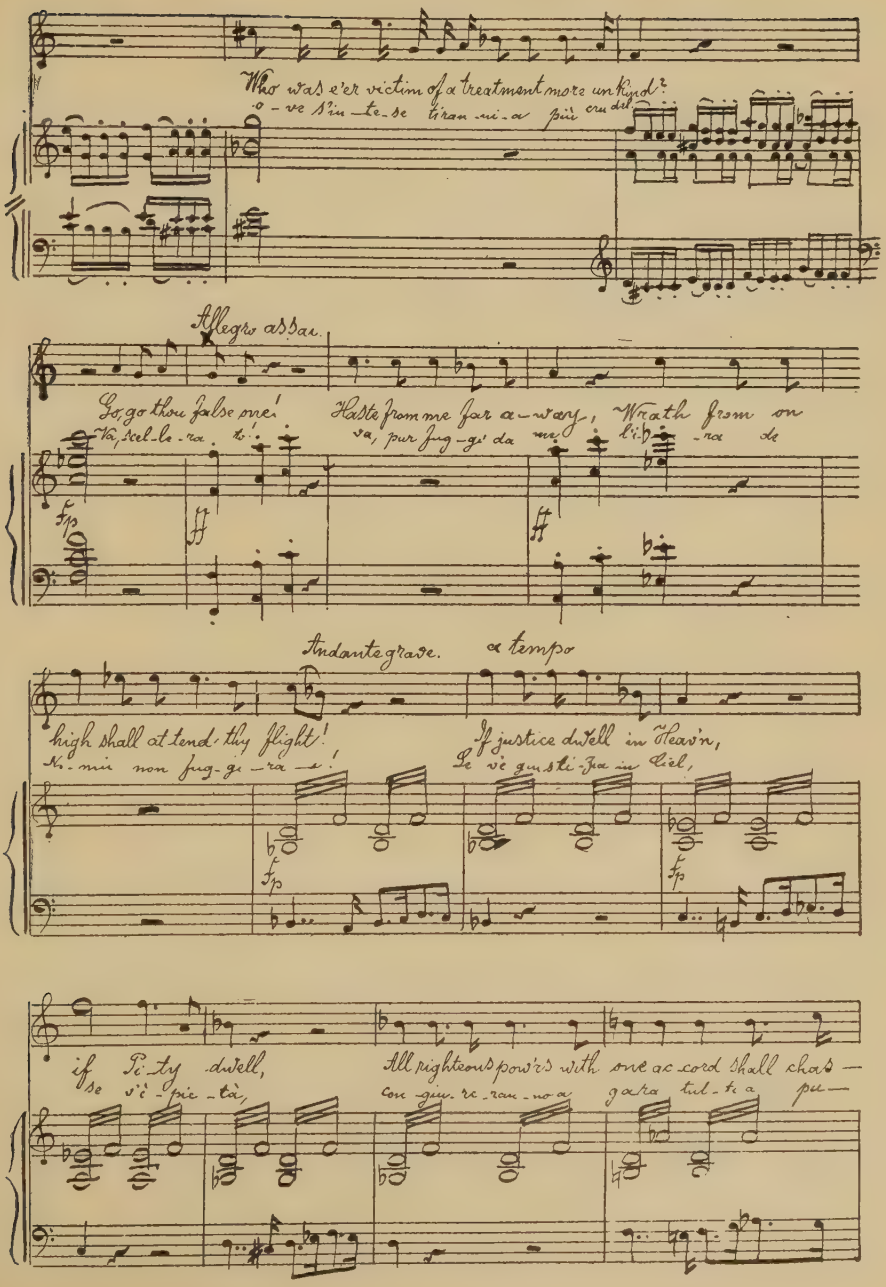


Beethoven, who almost always had the courage of his convictions, began to write these dissonances as we do. In the great aria, "Ah Perfido," he has put some in boldly, with no pretense of grace notes, while in some passages he has written them as appoggiatura, and in still others left them to the instinct of the singer. A portion of the aria follows.

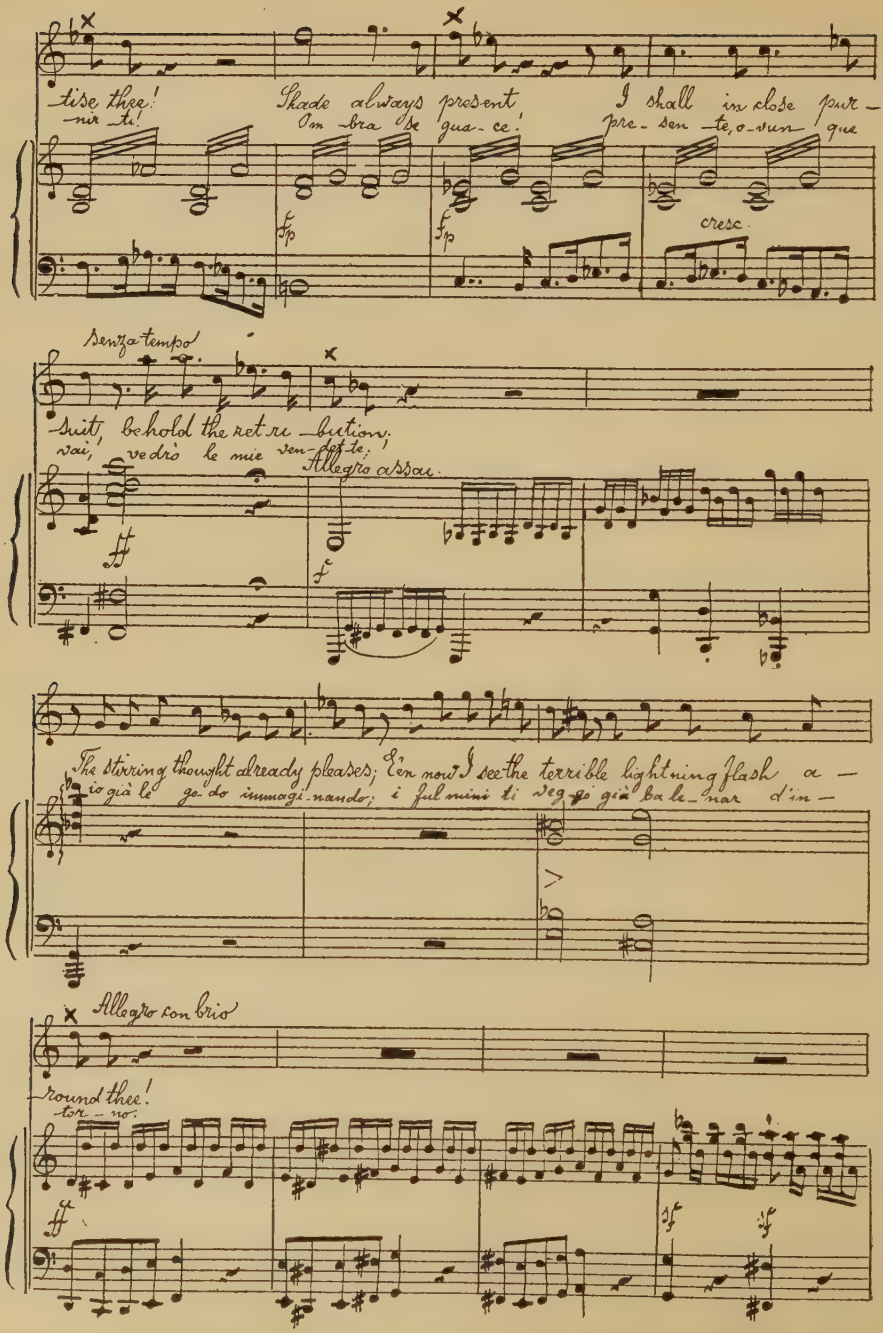
Example 75.


Ah! perfido.
Beethoven.
Allegro con brio.
Ah! perjur'd one,
Ah! perfido,
deceit-ful
sper-giu-ro,
canst thou so cru-el-ly for-sake me?
bar-ba-ro tradirmi, tu par-ti?
Andante
quasi Adagio
and in these words announce the abrupt de-par-ture?
e son que-sti
gl'ul-ti-mi tuoi con-ge-di?

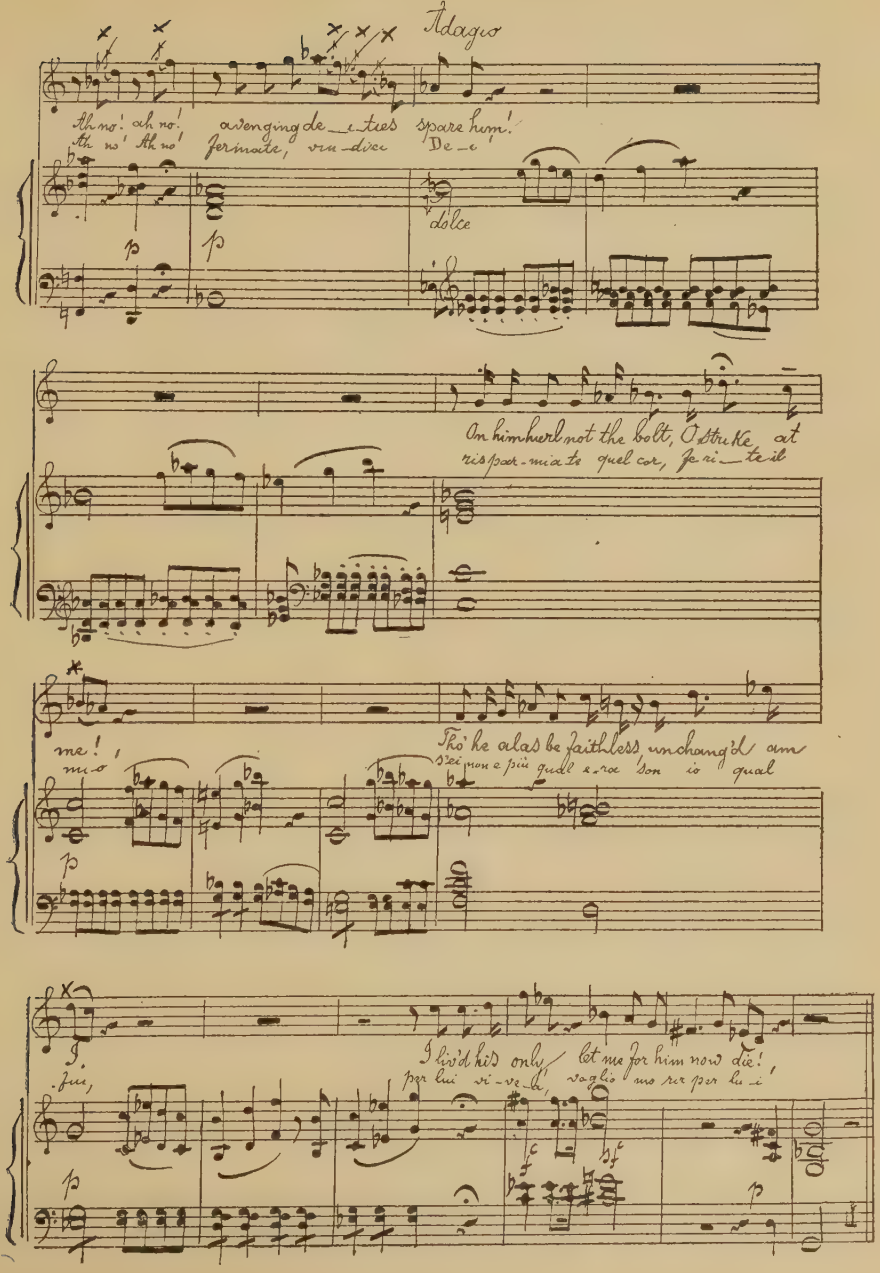
Example 75—Continued.



Example 75—Continued.



Example 75—Continued.



In the study of operas and oratorios of this period it will be noticed that the "upper note" is in every case the most forceful and important note in the melody, whose omission would devitalize the phrase.

It was with the introduction of the dominant seventh by Monteverde that the study of dissonances began. Italy was then at the head of the little world of music; but it was the infant German school that recognized the dramatic properties of dissonances, and who, by intellectual development, led up through the golden age of the great masters to the "Zarathustra" and "Till Eulenspiegel" of to-day. In Italy sensuous beauty was regarded as the prime necessity, and the appoggiatura soon became a special characteristic of the Italian school. The interpolation of one or two notes by the singer under given conditions suggested to the more ingenious the possibility of further additions, for the avowed purpose of embellishing the composition, but with the real object of displaying the beauty of the voice. When this privilege was used with discretion the effect was pleasing, for Italians have a natural melodic gift; but when *prime donne* developed particular vocal powers under the most agonizing dramatic circumstances, and tenors, dying of a dagger thrust, poured out their lives to trills and roulades, Italian opera had to be saved from its friends. The celebrated "*Una Voce poco fa*" from "Barber of Seville" contains examples of Italian embellishment at its best.

Degeneracy of Embellishment in Italy.

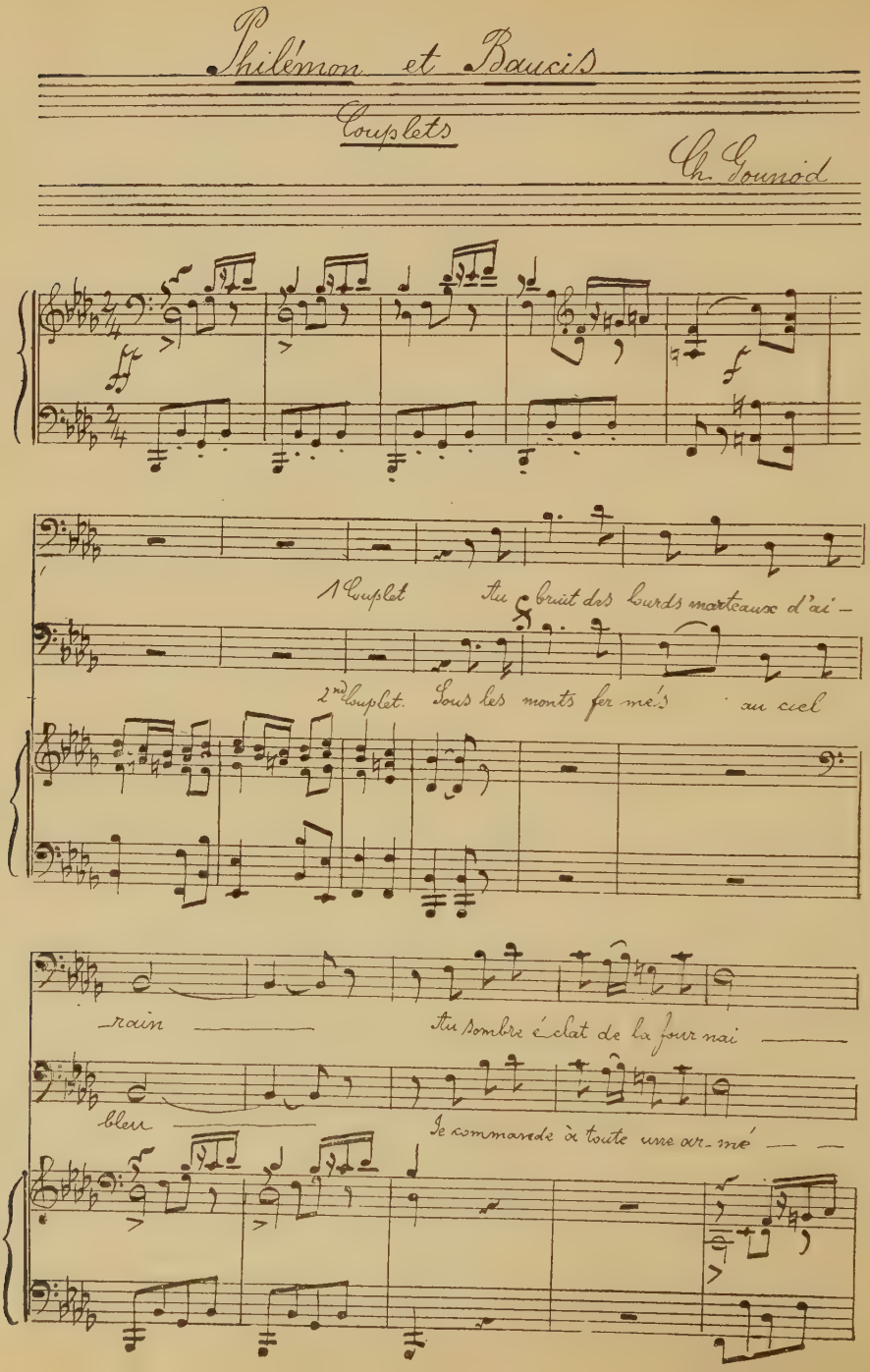
It is to the credit of public opinion that nothing in Art survives which is not based on natural law. In spite of the really delicious melodies contained in almost every Italian opera ever written, only those operas are given to-day that are truly dramatic, and many other musical effects which were perfectly legitimate in their day are now rejected as contrary to nature. In Glück's time, and somewhat later, the tenor voice took the place of our male alto—that is, it was trained as a falsetto voice pure and simple. The register of a legitimate tenor to-day is from C to A or B flat in alt, with an exceptional high C. The tenor of the older classic period, being falsetto, could go almost an octave higher. Naturally airs written for this voice are impossible now, but the tenor has lost in compass to gain in manliness.

The nearer to Nature the greater the art. Many years' experience as a teacher has impressed this upon the author, and he would like to

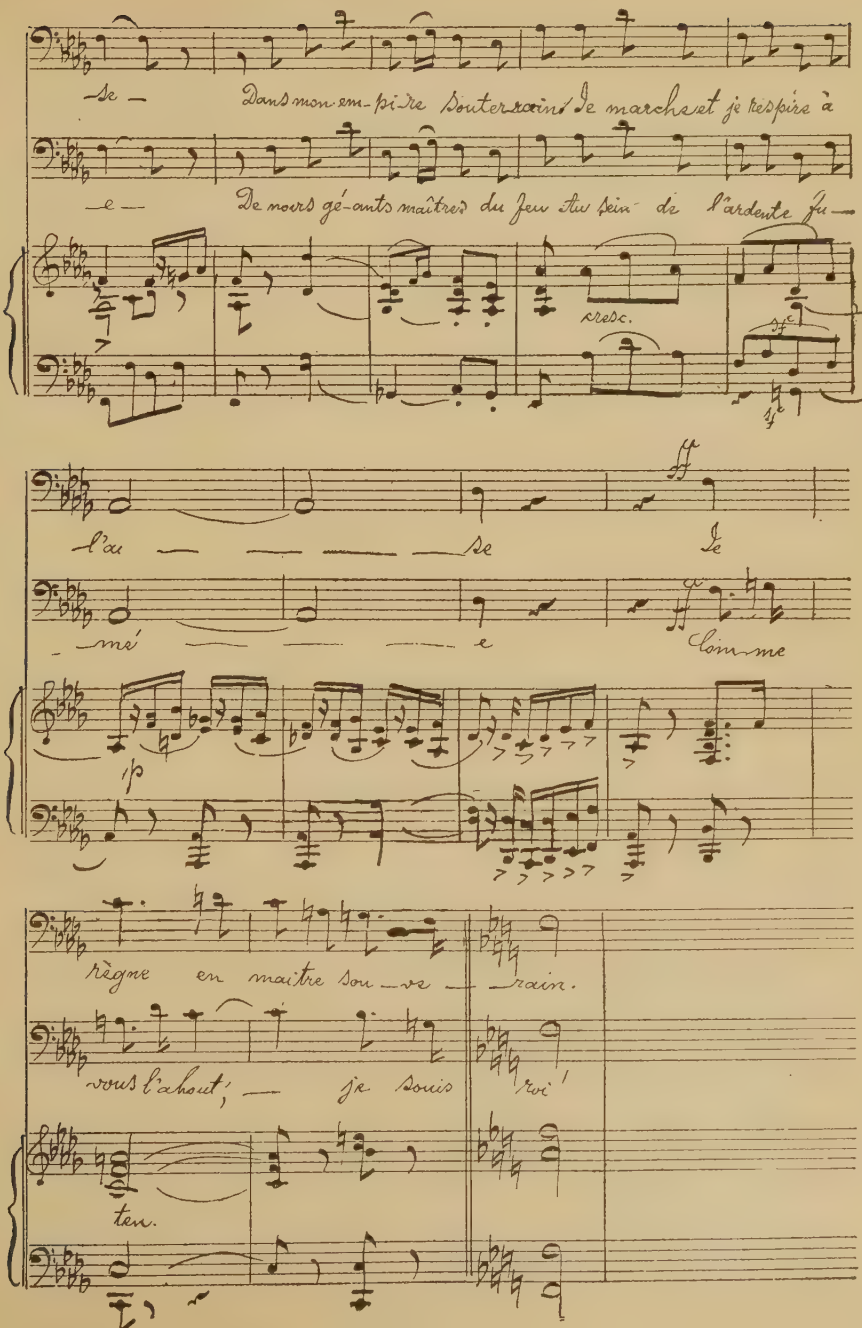
dissuade the young artist so far as possible from singing any but the songs written for his or her own voice. Though some songs can be transposed with a minimum of damage, the best are written for a particular register, because it is best suited to the sentiment of the poem. There are plenty for the largest repertoire without singing adaptations. Who can imagine dainty, frivolous, fascinating "Bonjour Suzon" sung in any but a tenor voice, though there is no paucity of manlier tenor songs? "Behut dich Gott," from the "Trompeter von Säkkingen," is typically baritone in sentiment and in tempo; and surely "Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt" is contralto by the same reasoning. Baritones borrow it regardless of the fact that Mignon was a girl. There are sufficient good songs for each sex to make unnecessary the frequent encroachments of one upon the domain of the other. In the face of custom the author insists that "Ich liebe dich" is a man's song. Women do not make love as a general thing, even in this day of aggressive femininity. How undignified are the reproaches of "A Summer Night" of Goring-Thomas, when sung by a woman! Almost as absurd as would be "Gretchen at the Spinning Wheel" if sung by a man.

The following introduction to Vulcan's song from "Philemon et Baucis," with its ponderous movement of music and text, is typically bass. Bass songs seem as a rule to range between the jovial drinking song and the utterances of the heavy villain. Note in this case the downward tendency of the passages, each with its accompanying ritenuto.

Example 76.


Philémon et Baucis
Couplets
Ch. Gounod
1 Couplet
Au bruit des lourds marteaux d'ai-
2de Couplet. Sous les monts fer més au ciel
rain
Au sombre éclat de la four nai
bleu
Je commande à toute une ar-mé

Example 76—Continued.



Something has been said of the part played by the tempo in determining the atmosphere of songs; but that atmosphere is produced above and beyond all other considerations by the register of the voice. The singer should apply his standard of proportion to his or her own organ first of all. A *pianissimo* passage given by a contralto should not be the tiny thread of tone proper to a soprano; but should be commensurate with the strength and color of the heavier voice. In that word "proportion" lies, we repeat, the secret of art. The rules given in this book are the foundation for interpretation, and in them lies the provision for every emotional effect; but study alone, with experience in their use, will bring judgment and artistic symmetry.

Relation of Shading to the Voice.

The main point in interpretation is to decide what is the salient characteristic of the song in hand: what special quality gives greatest aid to the quality of voice in creating its atmosphere. This quality must be emphasized above all smaller details of expression. As a general thing it will be covered by *one* of the rules laid down. For instance: the effect of Schubert's exquisite "Who Is Sylvia?" is entirely dependent upon an exact rhythm. "The Rosary," by Nevin, needs great care in the treatment of the reiterated notes. They must be given very rhythmically, for they are used to suggest the string of beads; then after three verses of cautious uniformity, how overwhelming the climax—that sudden, passionate cry. The key to "A Summer Night" lies in the words "so soon." "Hast thou forgotten, love, *so soon?*" Leave these words undetached, and how casual it all becomes. Also if the composer uses any phrase of the poem for his title it is a safe rule to emphasize them. They are usually the key to his thought. Notice songs "Could I," "Here Below," and a host of others that exemplify this.

Very early in this book the assertion was made that there is only one *right* interpretation, only one inexorably demanded by reason and natural law. This was said of the framework—the larger lines of interpretation. The relative truth of this affirmation, and its compatibility with true artistic liberty has surely become clear to the patient reader. Considering that the whole thought of a song can be altered by the treatment of one point, there

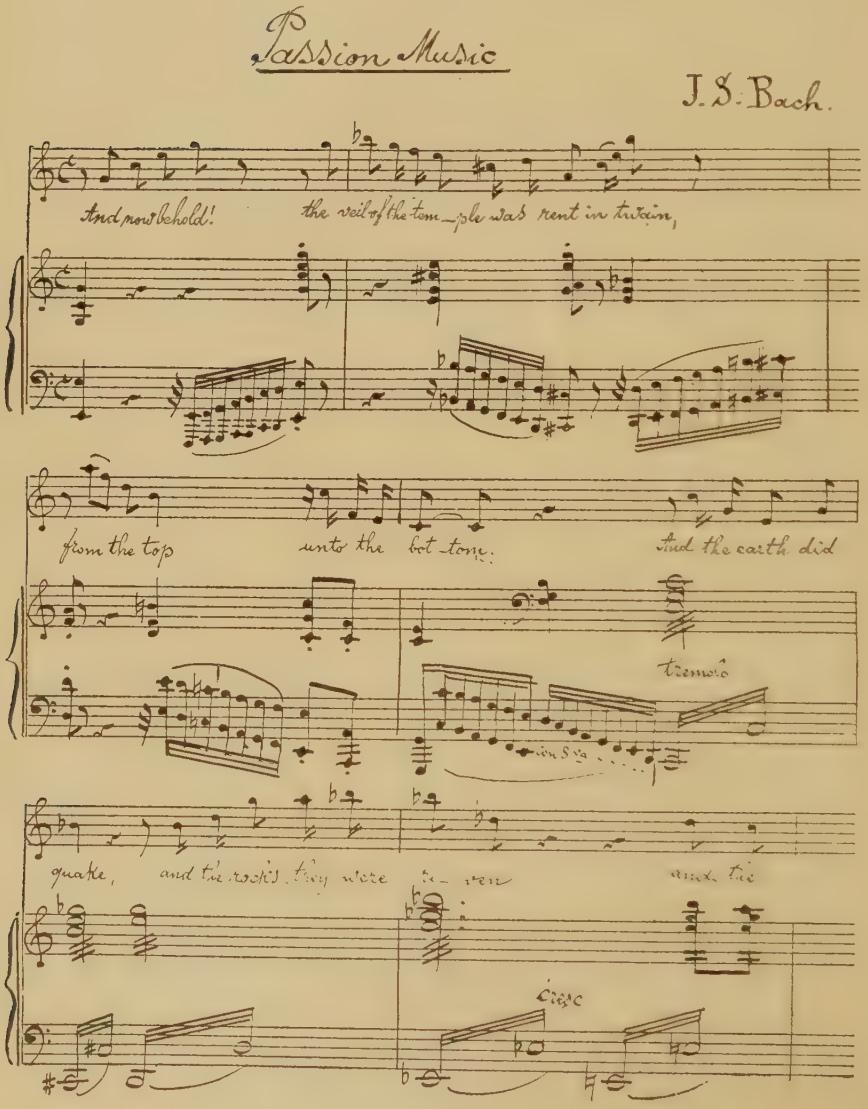
Possible Differences in Interpretation.

is room for radical differences of opinion within the domain of the general rules laid down.

There was the case of a singer, engaged a few years ago for the part of "Evangelist" in Bach's mighty "Passion According to St. Matthew." He fell into an amicable controversy with the leader of the orchestra on the question of the position of the climax of his part. The conductor affirmed that the climax came at the passage "and behold, the veil of the temple was rent, and the earth did quake, and the graves opened, etc." It had always been sung in that intention. It was the traditional conception, and appeared to be borne out by the almost pictorial vividness of the musical score. The music, he insisted, was the side of the question to be considered above all others. The singer, on the other hand, held the view that the text was of paramount importance, particularly in this instance; that the word "passion" meaning *suffering,* that the agony of Jesus, and consequently the climax of the work, were reached at the despairing cry: "My God, My God! Why hast thou forsaken me?" The conductor objected that the singer held only the position of narrator, so that he could not properly identify himself with that moment, and the tenor persisted that an Evangelist was not an ordinary narrator, but one to whom that sacred story was the central fact of life, and whose whole ambition was to bring its significance home to every heart. On the evening of performance the passage made an unprecedented sensation. The singer braved criticism to the extent of taking two climatic high notes with the open tone, usually forbidden to the male voice, but which gave an overwhelming effect of nature; for when in pain people always cry out with an open tone.

The two passages are appended, and the reader may judge for himself between the two ideas. *Neither conception disturbed the fundamental laws of expression.* It was merely a question of relative emphasis, and it was better for either of them to hold an erroneous opinion, ***founded on reasoning,*** than not to have thought at all.

Example 77—Conductor's Climax.



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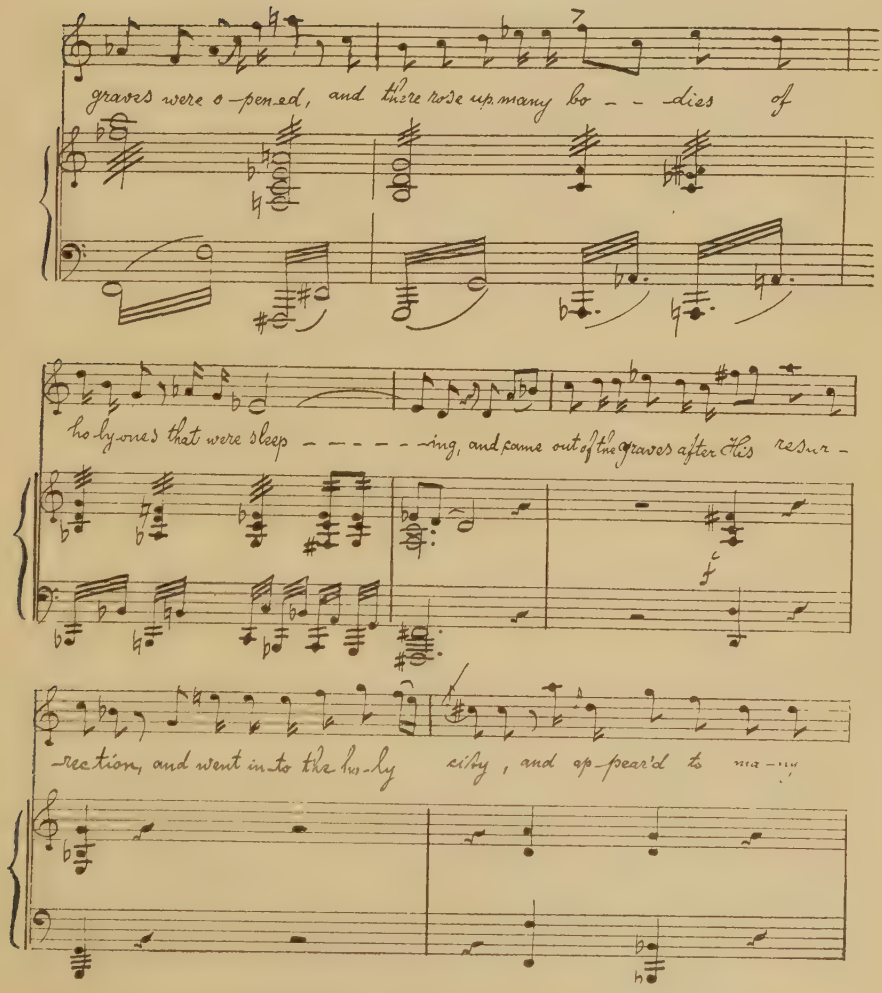
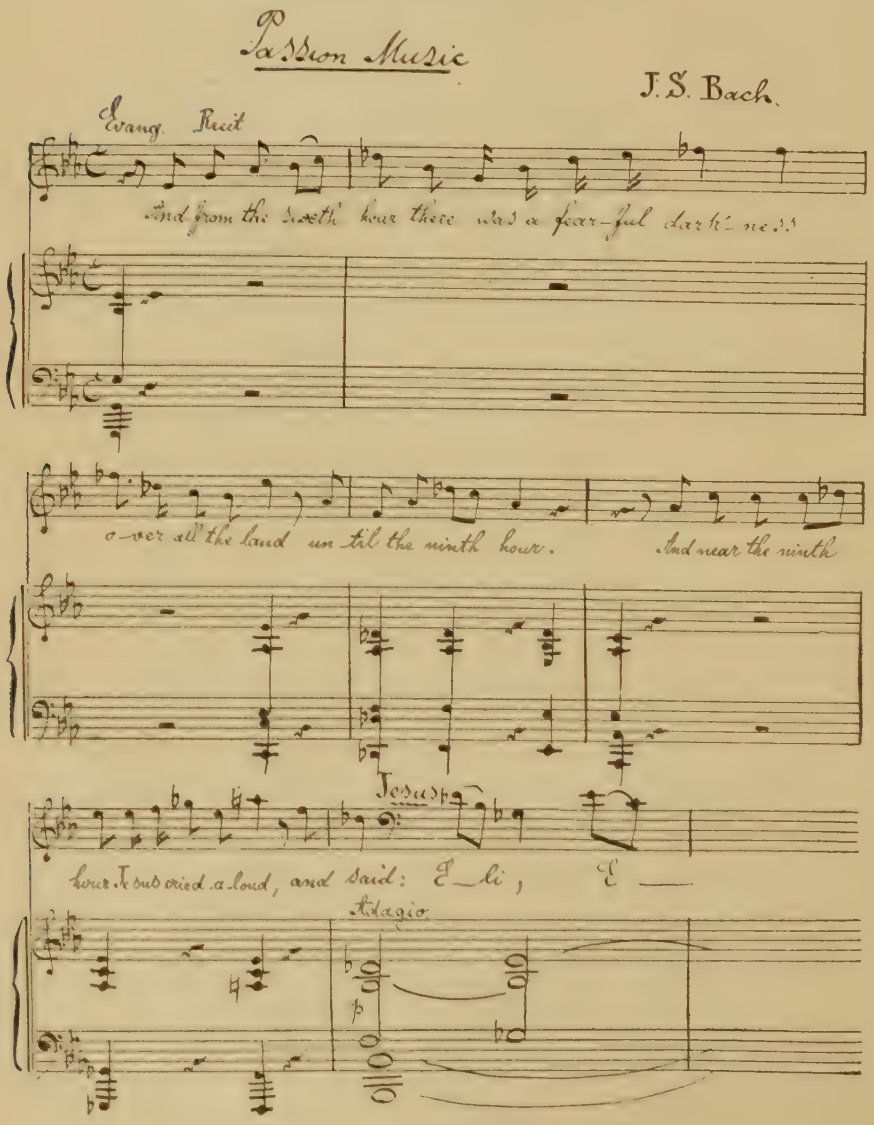


Example 78—Singer's Climax.



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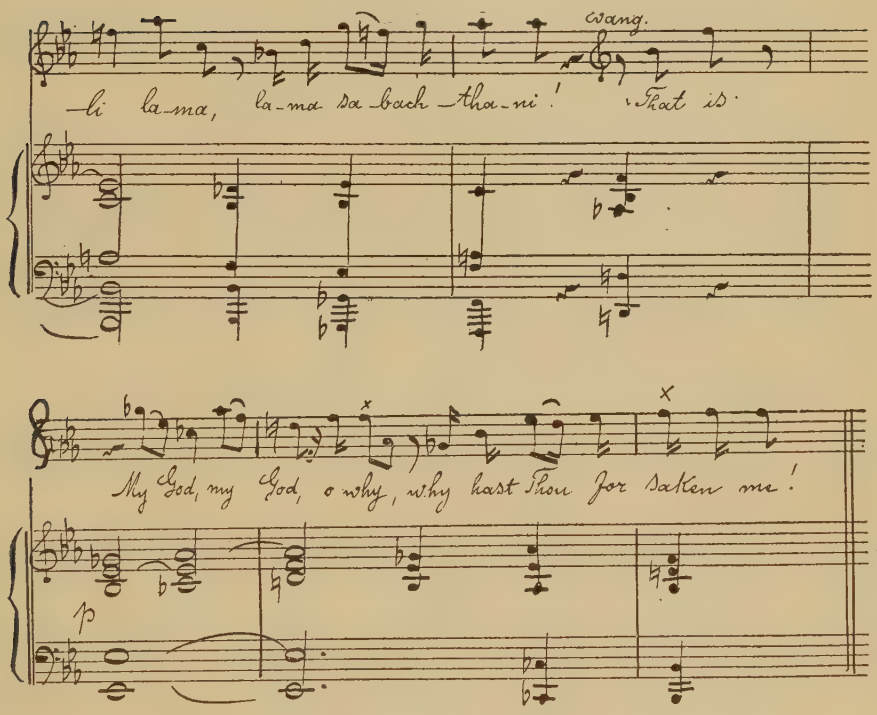

This may be regarded as the conclusion of the whole matter: Laws there are; but rules are only the foundation, and are interdependent. A good teacher can point the way; but let no student accept an interpretation that rests upon personal feeling only. Art is worthy of the best energies of the mind as well as of the emotional instincts. The young singer should gradually gain self-reliance, and do his own thinking, always bearing in mind that immortal saying: "Genius is eternal patience."

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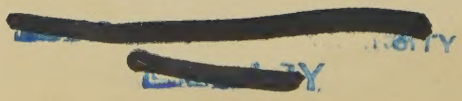

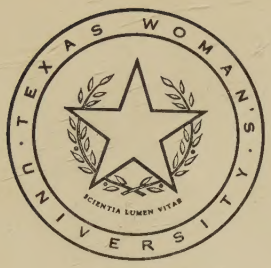

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